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FRENCH MEN OF LETTERS

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Already published

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE. By EDWARD DOWDEN, LL.D., Professor of English Literature in the University of Dublin, author of *A History of French Literature*, etc.

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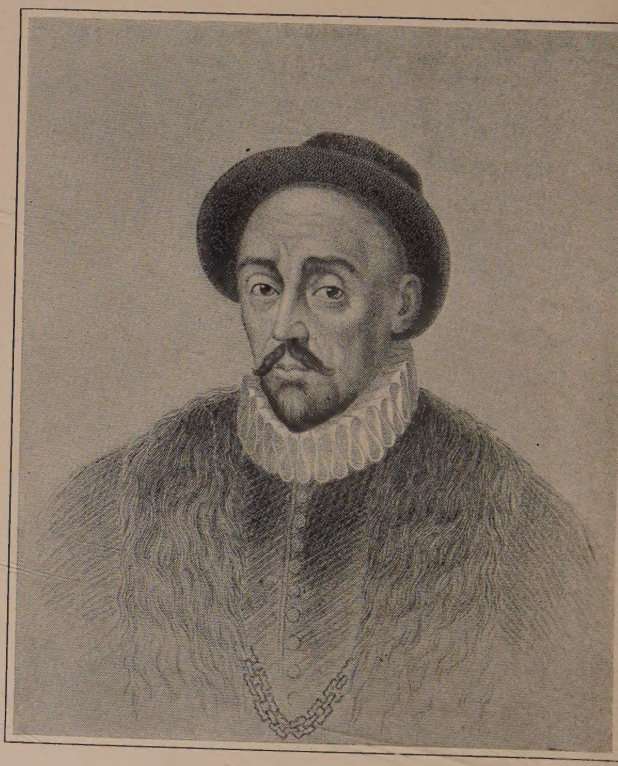

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

BY

EDWARD DOWDEN, LL.D.

AUTHOR OF

A History of French Literature

FRENCH MEN OF LETTERS

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ALEXANDER JESSUP, LITT.D.

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PREFACE

THE study of Montaigne during the nineteenth century falls into three periods. The somewhat barren period of the *Eulogies* (*Éloges*), in the earlier years of the century, was succeeded by a period of research; documents were discovered; the facts of Montaigne's life were carefully investigated; and the great collection of Dr. Payen, now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, was brought together. Finally, with further research, directed especially to ascertaining the text of the *Essays* (*Essais*) (1580–1588–1595) in its various forms, came the period when results were co-ordinated. In this third period the name of M. Bonnefon is of high distinction. No one can write on Montaigne without being his debtor. I desire here to acknowledge my own debt to many of my predecessors, and in particular to M. Bonnefon. But M. Bonnefon was able to assume an acquaintance with the *Essays* on the part of his readers which I have not assumed in those for whom I write; and accordingly I have had to proportion the parts of this book on a principle different from that which guided Montaigne's French biographer.

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PREFACE

All dates of writings given are those of first publication, unless otherwise stated. The date, 1580–1588–1595, refers to three successive editions of the *Essays*. The titles of books and other writings have been translated into English, except in cases where translation would be misleading; but the original French titles follow the translated titles in parentheses, the first time each occurs.

I have endeavoured as far as possible to go to the sources, but my chief source has been the *Essays* themselves. I have interwoven them with my narrative in many places. The *Bibliography*, derived almost exclusively from books on my own shelves, may assure the reader that I have not written without much preparatory study. Whatever its merits or defects may be, I believe it would not be presumptuous to say of this volume Montaigne's word: "C'est icy un Livre de bonne foy, Lecteur."

EDWARD DOWDEN.

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN, December, 1904.

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MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

MONTAIGNE is still a challenge to criticism. He has made the public his confidant, and we seem to know him as well and ill as we know ourselves, or as we know human nature. He comes to greet us as a simple Gascon gentleman, frank and loyal, yet he eludes us at first and much more afterwards. We imagine that we shall make acquaintance with an individual, and we find by and by that we have to study a population of spirits, moods, humours, tempers. Is it humanity itself, so undulant and various, with its strength and its weakness, its elevations and its mediocrities, its generosities and its egoism, its eternal doubt, its eternal credulities, its sociability and its central solitude, its craving for action, its longing for repose, its piety and its mockeries, its wisdom and its humorous follies—is it humanity itself that we are coming to know through this curious exemplar of the race? How shall we draw the lines which change at every moment? How shall we capture Proteus, and induce him to sit for his portrait? And what should a

portrait of Proteus resemble, whose unity consists in his being manifold?

Was there an earlier and a later Montaigne? Did he undergo a philosophical, if not a religious, conversion? And are some of the seeming—seeming, but perhaps also real—inconsistencies of his opinions and his temperament to be explained as belonging to the successive Montaignes of different epochs? We must attempt to control the impressions produced on a reader of the *Essays* by collating these with the facts of the writer's life, for the philosopher was also a magistrate, a courtier, a traveller, a man of affairs. Perhaps we shall find that the sceptic was a believer, if not a dogmatist; that the lover of retirement was not without worldly ambition; that the egoist was a citizen possessed by a sense of public duty, and prepared for a certain degree of sacrifice; that the seeker for balance and moderation was capable of passionate enthusiasm; that the pursuer of the wise mean was naturally a man of ardour, if not a man of extremes. To understand Montaigne aright we must view him not merely as the occupant of the philosophic tower, with its chapel below, and its Stoics, its Epicureans, its Pyrrhonists in the library above, but also in connection with his province, his country, and his times.

And what times those were of change, of trouble, of terror, of advances, alarms, retreats! The

philosophy of the Middle Age, under whose shelter or whose tyranny man so long found repose, had crumbled, but the ruins still stood and were threatening. The first period of the Renaissance in France was passing into the second, when the high hopes of dawning science and of a return to nature were sobered or touched with a sense of disillusion, when the enthusiasms of classical culture had somewhat stiffened and hardened into pedantry, and when the new passion for art and for beauty had in some degree sunk into the lust of luxury, with its curiosities of artificial refinement. Rabelais's cry of cheer, his gross laughter in the onset, were growing faint. "Do that which you will" no longer sounded like a complete code of morals and breviary of wisdom. The Renaissance, with its possibilities of a liberal sanity, was caught in the toils of the urgent religious contention. A new dogmatism of new interpreters of the Bible was at odds with the old dogmatism of the Church. Calvin, ruler of Geneva under Christ, was geometrising a Protestant theology. On the other side the bands arrayed on behalf of the counter-Reformation were accomplishing themselves in the drill of Loyola and his tactics of spiritual warfare. The Council of Trent was formulating the inspirations of the Holy Ghost in chapter and section. Unhappy France must needs have her wars of religion, illustrated by perfidies,

butcheries, rapes, pillage, conflagration. The zeal of God's House culminated—even if only by accident—in the St. Bartholomew massacre. Was it a deliberate design? Was it the chance-medley of religious fury? "Everywhere," wrote Father Panicarola in great joy to Rome, "we have seen rivers of blood, and mountains of dead bodies." A medal, struck by Pope Gregory XIII., commemorated the glorious triumph of the faith. "He who in our days," says Montaigne, "is but a parricide and a sacrilegious person is a man of worth and of honour."

At such a time to be temperate, loyal, truthful, tolerant, humane was not a little. Not being able to govern events, a man might find some gain in governing himself. To plead for justice, probity, charity, to honour the wise of past ages, to celebrate the joy of friendship, to set forth the principles of a sane education, to study the springs of good and evil in human nature, to observe, reflect, and grow wise, to leave for future generations a treasury of good sense, good temper, good humour, was perhaps to do much. The tower of Montaigne might seem a pharos of illumination, as we look back upon it, in the midst of this wide welter of passions, crimes, and follies. There he might bring together a heritage for the better France of coming years. "I call Montaigne," says Sainte-Beuve, in the closing words of one of

his studies, "the wisest Frenchman that ever lived." His wisdom has been an influence making for sanity during upwards of three centuries.

The wisest of men, as Montaigne was aware, may have some grains of folly in his composition. It was a pardonable infirmity that he wished his family to be considered more honourable from a social point of view than the facts warranted. When Joseph Scaliger described the father of Montaigne as a vendor of herring, he perverted the truth only by the error of one generation. The ancestry of the essayist can be traced back to the early years of the fifteenth century, when his great grandfather Ramon Eyquem (or Ayquem) was a considerable merchant in the city of Bordeaux. He exported wines and sold pastel (woad) and dried fish. Heir to his maternal uncle Ramon de Gaujac, and married to an heiress, Isabeau de Ferraignes, Ramon increased in worldly goods through his own industry, and added field to field and house to house. In 1477, when he was halfway between seventy and eighty years old, he purchased the noble mansion and property of Montaigne and Belbeys, "with the vines, woods, lands, fields, and mills, thereto pertaining"—a purchase made rather in the spirit of the founder of a family than through any personal ambition or vanity. The house stood on the right bank of the Dor-

dogne, in the department of that name, upon an elevation not remote from the Lidoire, which winds in a great curve among its sunny meadows and below its grassy heights. From the terrace a wide prospect, rich in rural incidents, is visible. The country breathes an air of tranquillity, and across the tranquil spaces comes floating now and again the sound of a bell from some distant church-spire. The overlord to whom the Seigneur de Montaigne did homage was the Archbishop of Bordeaux. A year after his purchase, just as he was preparing to set forth on a pilgrimage to St. James of Compostella (11 June, 1478), Ramon Eyquem died.

His son, Grimon, born about 1450, continued to maintain the business in the Rue de la Rousselle, and extended it in various directions. He became a person of no small importance in Bordeaux, occupying municipal positions of distinction, which serve as evidences of a public esteem based upon a knowledge of his integrity of character and soundness of judgment. And again a marriage with the daughter of a wealthy merchant, Grimon du Four, added to the family dignity and prosperity. In 1518 Grimon Eyquem died at the age of sixty-nine, leaving behind him four sons and two daughters. The eldest of these sons was the father of Michel de Montaigne, the Essayist.

So far, in tracing Montaigne's ancestry, we

have been among members of the prosperous middle class. Energy, steadfastness, good sense seem to have been virtues of the race. Our Montaigne, of the legend—a legend in the formation of which he himself assisted—is indolent and idle; he was, in fact, a man of energy like his ancestors; even in his retirement his brain at least was indefatigably agile. His retirement was, indeed, itself an act of energetic decision; and in his tower, as year succeeded year, he was steadfast, amid all the vicissitudes of his thoughts and what he might style his reveries or whimsies, steadfast in accomplishing a considerable task, which was—as our tasks should be—a great pleasure. The good sense of a successful merchant, mingling with other and widely different qualities, is elevated by Montaigne into the good sense of a moralist and a philosopher.*

With Montaigne's father, Pierre Eyquem, we pass from bourgeois surroundings to a wider field of experience and adventure. In him we find not merely the middle-class steadfastness, but a certain originality of character and of ideas. Pierre, the eldest child of Grimon Eyquem, was born in 1495 at Montaigne—the only Eyquem born or

* Montaigne's notion that his ancestry was in part of English origin cannot be established as true, but some connections of the kind supposed may have been formed during the English occupation of Guyenne.

buried there, however it may have pleased the Essayist to allude to the birthplace or the tombs of his ancestors. On December 30, 1519, Pierre did homage for his estates, presented his pair of white gloves, and received the Archbishop's gracious embrace. Montaigne, who reverenced his father, has represented him as deficient in the gifts of education; but, though afterwards he may have forgotten his classics, Latin verses written by Pierre were printed when he was a lad of seventeen years of age, and at a later time he was familiar with Italian and Spanish. His younger brothers, Pierre the younger, a churchman, and Raymond, advocate and councillor, were men of distinguished culture. It was a time when the Italian wars opened up brilliant possibilities for an adventurous spirit. Pierre, though low of stature, was well-shaped, full of force and dexterity, dark-complexioned, pleasant to look on, a lover of manly exercises. He chose to open his oyster, the world, with a sword rather than a pen. France had need of gallant service from her sons both before and after the disastrous battle of Pavia. We do not know the precise date at which Pierre Eyquem's sieges, surprises, encounters, retreats began, but we know that he was in Italy during many years and that by January, 1528, he had returned to France. His son assures us that he kept a journal of the incidents and events of

his life as a soldier; unhappily no such manuscript is now known to be in existence. He brought back from Italy a love of culture, a faith in certain new ideas, and a profound reverence—at which his son smiles, but in no unkindly spirit—for men of learning, "sacred persons", whose sentences he regarded as oracles, and to whom his hospitable doors were ever open.

On his way home from Italy Pierre Eyquem, whose adventurous life had included no dishonorable love-adventure, was married at the age of thirty-three (15 January, 1528) to Antoinette de Louppes, daughter of Pierre de Louppes, a wealthy merchant of Toulouse. The original name of the family was Lopès; it came from Villanova, near Toledo, and there is little doubt that its members, settled in Toulouse and Bordeaux as merchants and physicians, were among the expelled Jews, who had embraced a real or a professed Christian faith under the stress of persecution—the "New Christians", as they were commonly designated. Thus a Spanish and a Jewish strain qualified the Gascon blood of Montaigne. It was not without an influence on his mind that diversity should be his birthright. His temper could not but be affected by the fact that the religious differences of the time existed in his own family, among those whom he esteemed and loved. His father was a devout member of the

Roman Communion. His mother not improbably adhered to the Reformed Faith, adopted by her father and her uncle. That Thomas, Seigneur de Beauregard, one of his brothers, and Jeanne, his sister, who married the councillor Richard de Lestonnac, were Protestants is certain; perhaps a second sister held the same creed. The wars of religion were brought, in seriousness but without excessive bitterness, into the domestic circle. The facts of his own household cannot but have stimulated—stimulated and also checked—a critical spirit in matters of religion. Tolerance may have been accepted as a part of household piety. And perhaps the heresy of a brother and a sister may have served to point out his own special rôle of theological originality, as something other than heresy, a special kind of orthodoxy, a transcendental faith, which might act as a happy substitute for scepticism, an originality of docility and submission which allowed him to pursue his own ideas in a less exalted region of the air with singular independence. How to be orthodox with the utmost economy of force was a problem skilfully solved by Montaigne.

While attached to his seigneurial property of Montaigne, Pierre Eyquem often occupied his house in the Rue de Rousselle; though the hereditary smell of dried fish may now have grown faint, he was merchant enough to sell in Bordeaux the

wine of his own vineyards. His fellow citizens recognised his integrity, his disinterestedness, and his vigour in public affairs, and he occupied successively all the chief municipal offices from jurat (town-councillor) to sub-mayor (1536) and mayor (1554 to 1556). Pierre Eyquem accepted his public duties in the spirit of serious diligence. "I very well remember when a boy," writes Montaigne, "to have seen him in his old age cruelly tormented in mind about these vexing public affairs, forgetting the gentle aspect (*le doulx air*) of his own house, to which the infirmity of his years had for long previously attached him, the management of his concerns, and his health; despising his life, which he thought to lose, engaged as he was, on behalf of others, upon long and painful journeys.*

On one of these journeys to Paris, the object of which was the recovery of certain forfeited privileges of the citizens of Bordeaux, Pierre took as his eloquent assistants a number of pipes of the country's wine, which he distributed among those in power with the happiest result. A man of limited education but with an ardent faith in learning, he occupied himself much with the advancement of education in the city, especially in connection with the recently founded College of

* *Essays*, III, 10.

Guyenne (1533). Under the principalship of the distinguished scholar, André de Gouvéa, a "new Christian" of Portuguese origin, it became the best school in France; and it was Pierre, as submayor, who had handed to Gouvéa (1536) his letters of naturalisation. "Such was he," his son goes on, "and this humour of his proceeded from a great goodness of nature; never was there a spirit more charitable or more devoted to the people (*populaire*)."

Bordeaux was Pierre's field of public action; but Montaigne, with its "*doulx air*", was the home of his intimate affection. He was constantly busy altering, improving, adding to his cherished possession:

"My father took a delight in building at Montaigne, where he was born; and in all the ordering of domestic affairs I love to follow his example and rules, and I would engage those who succeed me to do the same as far as I am able. Could I do better for him, I would; I have my pride in knowing that his will still operates and acts through me. God forbid that through my handling I should let slip any shadow of life which I could render to so good a father! When I have concerned myself to finish some old fragment of wall, or to repair some piece of ill-constructed building, truly it has been more out of respect for his design than for any satisfaction of my own."*

At the close of 1554 Pierre Eyquem obtained permission from his suzerain, the Archbishop, to

Essays, III, 9.

rebuild the château, and render it sufficiently strong to resist any sudden assault, such as might not improbably be attempted in that time of social and political disturbance. There was a rare combination of great energy with great gentleness in Pierre's character; in his bearing a sweet gravity and modesty were apparent; he was "monstrously punctual" in keeping his word. In old age he still remained active. "I have seen him," writes his son, "when three-score make scorn of our agility, throw himself in his furred gown on horseback, make the circuit of the table on his thumb; and seldom would he mount to his chamber without taking three or four stairs at a time." *

Montaigne's father died, 18 June, 1568, at the age of seventy-two. His memory remained as one of his son's most precious possessions. He preserved the long wands or rods which the old man was accustomed to carry in his walks; he dressed in black or white because to do so was his father's habit; and when the old cloak worn by Pierre was thrown about him as he rode, "I seem," he says, with an outbreak of manly tenderness, "to wrap myself up in my father." The widowed mother of Montaigne for long survived her husband, and survived also, by several years,

* *Essays*, II, 2.

her son, the Essayist. She died, 23 July, 1601, at a great old age, seventy-three years from the date of her marriage. In her will she speaks with an honest pride of her prudent and successful domestic economy.

"I was born between eleven o'clock and noontide, on the last day of February, 1533, as we reckon at present, beginning the year with January." Thus, with all precision, Montaigne records the fact. The place of his birth was the noble house of Montaigne. He was the third child of his parents, but of those who survived the eldest; the earlier children had probably died in their infancy.* Following a practice not infrequently adopted, Pierre Eyquem chose as godparents of the boy persons of the humblest rank, and from the name of an unknown godfather it is supposed that the Christian name—Michel—was derived.† His father's wish was to attach his son to the common people, to make him have a care rather, as Montaigne puts it, "for him who stretches his arms to me than for him who turns his back upon me." With the same intention, and also in the hope of making the boy hardy, Pierre

* The statement here made gives the conclusion generally accepted, after much discussion.

† M. Bonnefon notices that Montesquieu in Guyenne and Buffon in Bourgogne were held at the baptismal font by poor folk.

sent the infant from the cradle to a poor village on his estate—conjectured to be Papessus—to be nursed by a peasant, and reared with the utmost simplicity. The result of such an experiment might have been to give Montaigne a distaste for humble ways of living; but, as a fact, the end answered his father's expectations, and Montaigne all through his writings shows a compassionate interest in the life of the peasantry and a respect for their manly virtue. He remained with his foster-mother for some time after he had been weaned, and acquired a hardiness in the matter of diet which was of service to him in later years.

Pierre Eyquem was a man accessible to new ideas and disposed to put such ideas into practice. His son gives an account of a project conceived by him of a central agency or bureau of exchange in every great city, where wants could be registered and supplied, and by means of which situations could be sought and filled. His ideas on education were not only of a novel kind, but, in the instance of little Michel, were carried into effect. At a time when paternal authority was commonly exercised with harshness, Pierre Eyquem tried the discipline of gentleness. At a time when the argument of the rod determined all differences between father and son, he hung up the rod—which was only to be employed on the rarest occasions,

and with a sparing hand—and chose to rule by love. In Montaigne's own opinion there are only two faults which ought to be sternly checked and, if possible, uprooted in childhood—lying and obstinacy; these, if once permitted to grow into habits, become, he believed, irreclaimable vices. The offence of lying, the greater vice of the two, he treats less as a breach of divine law than as treason against humanity. Man is a sociable being, and falsehood is an evasion of the duty and the delight of frank communication. "How much less sociable," he exclaims, "is false speaking than silence." Yet every little fault, springing up even in infancy, Montaigne felt, has in it a threat for future years. The petty cruelties of a boy are not to be encouraged by a mother as tokens of a manly temper. A father must not allow his son to domineer over a peasant or a servant, nor to overreach a playfellow by some dishonourable ingenuity. For his own part, Montaigne had the happiness to be brought up to a plain, straightforward way of dealing with others; the habits of openness and integrity became an instinctive part of his later life.

Pierre Eyquem had consulted those sacred persons, men of learning, whose acquaintance he had sought in Italy, and afterwards at Montaigne, and they had advised him to train up a child in all sweetness and liberty, without rigour

or constraint, so that the love of knowledge might be a spontaneous and happy blossoming of the faculties. It is almost a symbol of the whole process that every morning the boy was lifted out of the depth of a child's sleep by no rude hand, but gently, at the invitation of some musical instrument; the tender cells of the brain were not to be shattered and the morning spoilt, but a harmonious mood should meet the harmony of the widening light.

His advisers had assured Montaigne's good father that the time spent in laboriously learning the tongues was the sole cause why the moderns do not obtain the grandeur of soul and perfection of knowledge of the ancient Greeks and Romans. "I do not, however," comments the Essayist, smiling a little at his father's simplicity, "believe that to be the only cause."

"While I was still at nurse"—so Montaigne recounts the process of the experiment in education—"and before my tongue was loosed in speech, he gave me in charge to a German [probably Horstanus], who since died a famous physician in France, wholly ignorant of our language and very well versed in Latin. This man, whom he had sent for expressly, and who was very highly paid, had me continually in his arms. He had with him two others, less learned, to attend upon me, and relieve the first. They spoke to me in no other language than Latin. As to the rest of the household, it was an inviolable rule that neither my father himself, nor my mother, nor valet, nor chambermaid should utter anything in my company but such Latin

words as each had learnt in order to prattle with me. The gain to all of them was wonderful; my father and my mother learnt enough Latin to understand it, and to use it themselves when there was need, as also did the servants who chiefly waited upon me. In short, we latinised at such a rate that it overflowed upon our villages all round, where there still survive, having taken root through custom, many Latin terms for workmen and their tools. As for myself, I was over six years old before I understood more of French or Perigordin than I did of Arabic; and without art, without book, without grammar or rule, without the rod and without a tear, I had learnt Latin quite as pure as my master's, for I had not the means of mingling or corrupting it. If a theme was given me, as is the way in schools, they gave it to others in French, but with me it had to be given in bad Latin to be turned into good. . . . As to Greek, of which I have almost no understanding, my father purposed to have it taught me by art, but in a new fashion, by way of sport and recreative exercise; we rolled about our declensions, like those, who, with games upon a checker-board, learn arithmetic and geometry." *

That the result of his father's method did not in the end quite answer his expectations was caused, Montaigne supposes, partly by the fact that it was not persisted in for a sufficiently long time, partly by the fact that the scholar was naturally "heavy, soft, and lethargic." Sound of constitution he was; reasonably good-natured and tractable; but he could not be roused even to play. And yet underneath this heavy complexion he nourished bold imaginings and opinions

* *Essays*, I, 25.

beyond his years. "What I saw," he says, "I saw aright"; but the slow-witted boy seemed to advance no further than he was led; and, to make matters worse, he suffered from an incredible defect of memory. Roger Ascham, a teacher of experience, has observed that tough and tardy wits are not the worst.

The judgment of Pierre Eyquem's friends and neighbours was adverse to his experiment in education, and the good man yielded to public opinion. At the age of six years Michel was sent to the College of Guyenne, then a celebrated school, presided over by distinguished teachers. The principal, André de Gouvéa, had come from the College of Sainte-Barbe in Paris, in the year 1534, bringing with him a staff of eminent professors. It was essentially a grammar school, having as its special, though not its exclusive, object the study of Latin. The course extended over seven years or upwards, beginning with the elements of grammar, and rising at the close to the study of ancient history and that of rhetoric, with declamations in the Latin tongue. Greek was reserved for scholars of the more advanced classes. Cicero, and again Cicero, was for all scholars the staple commodity, after the milk for babes had been thoroughly assimilated. But this perpetual Ciceroising was tempered by plays of Terence, and by portions of Ovid and Virgil. In consideration of

his exceptional knowledge of Latin, Montaigne was at once placed in a class above that which his age would naturally indicate as suitable. Several of his masters afterwards assured him that, perceiving Latin to come to his lips as a child with perfect readiness, they, who could not but pick and choose their words, were timid of entering into discourse with him.

Looking back from his later years upon his course of training, Montaigne hardly does justice to a system to which he probably owed more than he was aware. He declares that his Latin grew corrupt at school, and that, after seven years of study, he brought with him from the college no kind of advantage of which he could honestly boast. Too much time, he thought, was spent over words; the memory was overburdened; the judgment was exercised little, or not at all. But, in truth, few other things are so important to us as words—the tools we have to handle during our entire lifetime—and the judgment can be little exercised until the mind, putting to good use the memory, has possessed itself of a certain body of facts, on which the judgment may go to work. The great defect of Montaigne's education was its neglect of scientific knowledge and scientific method. His writings might have lost something, but would have gained more, if his sinuosities of meditation had sometimes only served

to disguise the processes of exact and progressive thought.

Beside the teachers of the regular school hours, private tutors, chosen from among those teachers or from outside the college, were secured for Michel by the affectionate care of his father. Pierre Eyquem insisted upon the knowledge of Greek as a condition of their fitness.* Among these were Nicolas Grouchy, author of a treatise, *De Comitiis Romanorum;* Guillaume Guerente, who wrote a commentary upon Aristotle; the great Scottish poet and scholar, George Buchanan; and at a considerably later time, Marc Antoine Muret, "whom both France and Italy," says Montaigne, "have acknowledged to be the best orator of his time." Buchanan had fled from Scotland, where his mockery of the Franciscans had excited hostility against him. In Bordeaux his satirical spirit again brought him into trouble, —now with the Dominicans—and he is said to have sought and found shelter for a time in Pierre Eyquem's château of Montaigne. The influence of Muret, still a youth, but one of extraordinary

* Montaigne's sister, Mme. de Lestonnac, it is related, was able to follow the Greek of a councillor of Bordeaux, who hoped to convey secretly, in that learned tongue, some unworthy advice to her husband; she rose to the occasion, and scolded the ill adviser out of her doors with Homeric vituperation.

and brilliant attainments, may have tended to give some of that license to Montaigne's tongue which he indulges, and tries to justify, in the *Essays*. Buchanan, Guerente, and Muret were authors of Latin tragedies, and with the approval of Gouvéa, these were presented "with great dignity" by the students. "I had no little assurance of countenance," writes Montaigne, "and flexibility of voice and gesture in adapting myself to any dramatic part." By the time that he was twelve years old, he had played the leading parts in many of these tragedies, and was looked upon as one of the best actors. Montaigne's awakening to literature came in his seventh or eighth year, and, as so often happens, through no regular instruction, but by a private and solitary experience, and almost by a happy accident. The story is best related in his own words:

"The first taste I had for books came to me from the pleasure I found in the fables of Ovid's *Metamorphoses;* for, being about seven or eight years old, I withdrew myself from every pleasure in order to read them; so much the more because this was my mother tongue, and the book the easiest I had known, and the best suited by its matter to my tender age. For the *Lancelots of the Lake,* the *Amadis,* the *Huons of Bordeaux,* and such farrago of books, in which childhood finds diversion, I had never heard even their names—nor do I yet know their substance —so exact was my discipline! I thereupon grew more indifferent to the study of my prescribed tasks; and uncommonly lucky it was that I had to do with a tutor of in-

telligence, who knew how to connive cleverly at this debauch of mine, and at others like it; for thus at full speed I ran through Virgil's Æneid, and then Terence, and then Plautus, and some Italian comedies, allured ever by the sweetness of the subject. . . . He bore himself discreetly, seeming to take no notice; he whetted my appetite, permitting me to devour those books only on the sly, and keeping me in an easy way to the other regular studies." *

But for this indulgent tutor Montaigne declares that he might have carried away from school, as most young gentlemen do, nothing save a hatred of books.

Montaigne's views on education are set forth in the twenty-fifth essay of the First Book. If any one would make acquaintance not with the sceptic but with the ardent believer, let him read this essay. It is the utterance of no weary doubter, reduced to universal indifference, but of a man of enthusiastic and joyous faith. It rises in some passages to a noble, virile eloquence, becoming indeed a hymn—but a hymn touched at times with humour—in honour of a wise and happy sanity. The essay is addressed to the Countess de Gurson, who bore an illustrious name —Diane de Foix. She looked forward to the birth of her first child, who, Montaigne smilingly asserts, must surely be a boy, for she is "too generous to begin otherwise than with a male." The

* *Essays*, I, 25.

Essayist's words of counsel to the mother form the best instruction he can give to " the little man that threatens her shortly with a happy birth." The writer's preluding of self-depreciation, half-humorous yet entirely sincere, is in his inimitable manner of easy, amiable, and overflowing confession. Then he addresses himself to his subject—*The Institution of Children.* The prognostics derived from a child's inclination for this or that pursuit need not be too seriously regarded. Give him such studies as are best, and he will become what nature designed him to be. Choose for the boy a tutor who has rather a " well-made" than a " well-filled" head. Such a teacher will exercise the child's faculties instead of filling his memory with words and little pellets of indigested facts. He will encourage the pupil to examine things for himself rather than to accept statements upon authority. He will allow him to perceive the diversity of opinions on many topics, and if he remains in uncertainty, is it ill done that he should be instructed in that important part of human conduct—how to doubt?

Montaigne's ideal of education is Socratic and Platonic in its aiming at life and practice. He was familiar, of course, in Amyot's translation, with the treatise on education attributed, probably erroneously, to Plutarch. From such thinkers he could not but learn to admire a method of train-

ing which develops the whole of our humanity, body and soul, with a view to conduct rather than with a view to science. The one science in his eyes worth knowing thoroughly is that of living well and dying well. But if classical antiquity lay behind Montaigne, he was also the offspring of the Renaissance. Erasmus, before Montaigne, had protested against the harshness of the discipline of the Middle Age. Rabelais loved knowledge for its own sake with an enthusiasm unknown to Montaigne. He had been carried away by a glorious intoxication of knowledge, and in his vast encyclopædic scheme of education lay an anticipation of what generations of men, but hardly any individual man, might attain, an anticipation of what in a measure they have since attained. Montaigne is more exclusively the moralist, and perhaps a moralist who grasps too eagerly at immediate gains for character and conduct. From the mere point of view of science he is somewhat of the dilettante; and, although the little gentleman whom he would form may learn what is valuable from a bricklayer or a peasant, he is essentially an aristocrat. There is, accordingly, in Montaigne's ideal a certain remoteness from the devotion to knowledge proper to the scholar or the man of science. He, like Shakespeare, views the pedant with a humorous disdain, as one whose brain is squeezed into a narrow compass by a

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superincumbent weight of erudition, or as a seed-picker who holds knowledge on the tip of the tongue, or as a mendicant who begs alms from the volumes upon his shelves. Even the learned Turnebus, true scholar and no pedant, did not dress simply, as a gentleman should. Montaigne could even speak disrespectfully of the first aorist of *tupto*. The learning that he valued is not that which is tied to the soul, but that which is incorporated with a man's life and being. He is the moralist rather than, in the widest sense, the humanist. Yet a humanist Montaigne is; and for the sake of a robust and completely accomplished humanity, he can relax his morals, applauding even an occasional excess in debauch as something which a gentleman should not indeed seek, but when need arises, gallantly sustain; something in which he ought not to show himself an inferior. The reaction against the scholastic methods of the Middle Age, its ergotisms, its endless dialectic, and the reaction also against its ideals of almost superhuman virtue are conspicuous throughout the essay on *Education*. Asceticism and authority, as it has been put by M. Hémon, comprehend the whole of the Middle Age; humanity and individualism comprehend the whole of Montaigne.

Not authority, but wisdom—wisdom, no matter from what source obtained, if only it be genuine, held as a living possession, and applied to a

man's best uses! The honey-bee makes his own honey, whether it be from marjoram or thyme that the sweetness comes. Therefore the understanding must have liberty, and roam abroad. Not merely books, but all the incidents of life should be our instructors; "a page's roguish trick, a servant's stupid blunder, a conversation at table" are so many excellent occasions for learning. Especially whatever whets and brightens the mind is to be sought, and hence our young gentleman must travel into foreign countries; not, indeed, to be qualified to report how many paces Santa Rotonda is in circuit, or how much longer and broader is Nero's face in a statue than upon some medal, but to observe the humours, manners, customs, and to study the laws of various peoples. Bodily exercises are not to be mere pleasant sport; they should include real strain and risk, so that a man may learn betimes to endure hardness. Converse with others should be not for self-display, but for the acquisition of intellectual gains, and therefore modesty, and sometimes silence, are much to be commended in a youth. In argument let him avoid petty subtleties, and choose to be bravely honest, loyally submitting to truth at the first moment he perceives it to tell against him, even though his adversary has not caught at the advantage. In company let him have an eye and ear in every corner; at the upper

end of the table the fine folk may only praise the arras or commend the wine, while at the inferior part of the board some humble guest may utter a good word. Let him be inquisitive after many things—a noble house, a fair fountain, a battlefield, an eminent man. And as to books, let him choose those which bring him into communion with great spirits of the past ages, reading not to learn the date of the ruin of Carthage, but to study the manner of life of Hannibal and Scipio, and upon these to try his judgment. To one who thus knows how to interpret it aright the most seemingly insignificant fact may become significant.

Some sufficient portion of the true wisdom of life having been won, all other things, all learning and science, law, physics, geometry, rhetoric, may with discretion be added to this; but this remains the one thing needful. Such divine philosophy is not harsh and crabbed, as fools suppose; it is charming, and even gay. "Who has masked philosophy with this false visage, pale and hideous? There is nothing more gay, more galliard, more frolic, and, I had like to have said, more wanton; she preaches nothing but feasting and jollity; an aspect melancholic and inanimate shows that she does not inhabit there." A wise and joyous soul will temper the body also to sanity and joy: "the express sign of wisdom is a constant cheerfulness; her state is like that of trans-

lunary things, always serene. . . . She has virtue for her end, which is not, as the schools declare, planted upon the summit of a broken, rugged, and inaccessible mountain; those who have approached her find her, on the contrary, to be seated in a fair, fertile, and flourishing plain, whence she clearly discerns all things below." Such is Montaigne's ideal of human attainment, and, gay and galliard as the vision may be, it is not a facile virtue that he commends, but a virtue transformed through virile passion and effort into a delight. If fortune fail, and fortitude be required, wisdom can create a better and a higher fortune based upon eternal foundations. But should a pupil shrink back to ease from the toil and sweat of the battle, "I see no other remedy," says the moralist, "than to bind him 'prentice in some good town, that he may learn to make minced pies, ay, though he were the son of a duke." This tune goes manly.

The end of all is action. Therefore that hydroptic thirst for knowledge, of which our poet Donne speaks, is not to be indulged; a man may be "embruted" by such a greed of intellect. Our pupil may learn philosophy in a garden, at a table, amid his diversions; so wisdom will gently and unawares insinuate itself into the soul. It is a man—soul and body in one—we seek to form, and the method should be sweet and also severe,

or rather both in living unison, *une sevère doulceur*, a severe sweetness. Let the school be no cruel house of correction for captive youth; rather let it be hung with pictures of Joy and Gladness, of Flora and the Graces. Make a boy hardy by other instruments than the bloody stumps of the birch rod; inure him to heat and cold, to wind and sun, and to dangers which he ought to despise. Let him embody true wisdom in deeds rather than learn it by rote to amuse himself with words. As for words, they will rise up quickly enough and aright upon the vivid perception of things. You may receive, if you please, an admirable lesson in rhetoric from a fishwife of the Petit Pont. Quicken wit, invention, judgment, and then a sinewy, muscular way of speech, the soldierlike style, straight-flung words and few, such as Montaigne especially loves, will come inevitably, and as it were, by nature.

So Montaigne sets forth his doctrine of education. If the programme of Rabelais, the sanguine man of science, be placed side by side with these counsels of the discreet, yet ardent, moralist, and if both be conceived as reduced within practicable limits by the experience and moderation of Ramus, we shall have before us a view of the most advanced ideas of the French Renaissance with reference to a matter which had become one of the great concerns of the period.

CHAPTER II

THE MAGISTRACY AND THE COURT

At the age of thirteen Montaigne had completed his course at the College of Guyenne. Little is known as to his manner of life during the ten years which followed his school-days, years of the highest importance in the formation of his mind. We leave Montaigne a child, and find him again a man qualified to undertake the duties of the magistracy. Little is known; much has been conjectured. But the joy and profit of conjectural biography is chiefly for the biographer, and more especially for that happy biographer who by a new conjecture triumphs over the latest theory of a predecessor.

It seems probable, however, that when Montaigne's studies as a schoolboy were ended he continued to attend the more advanced teaching given in the precincts of the College of Guyenne, which was recognised as part of the instruction in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Bordeaux. M. Bonnefon has pointed to a passage in the essay on *Education*, which describes the ordinary process of training, as being not improbably a record of the Essayist's own experience:

"We are kept for four or five years learning words, and tacking them together into clauses; as many more in spreading them abroad so as to form an extended body consisting of four or five parts; and yet again five years at least in learning to mix them and twist them together in a subtle fashion." That is to say, grammar is succeeded by rhetoric, and rhetoric by dialectic or law.*

There is no doubt that Montaigne, a boy between fifteen and sixteen years old, was present in Bordeaux during the eventful days of the revolt of the Gabelle in 1548. Taking the detested salt-tax as a symbol of all their miseries, the insurgents gathered at Saintonge, where the party of the Reformed Faith was strong. Under the leadership of the Sieur de Puymoreau they speedily became masters of the whole district. A formidable party, commanded by Talemagne, marched upon Bordeaux, conferred at Libourne with the municipal councillors, and stirred up the disaffected citizens. The tocsin pealed from the Hôtel de Ville, the streets were filled with uproar and tumult, the arsenal was seized, and the arms were distributed among the insurgents. Tristan de Moneins, lieutenant-general in Guyenne under the King of Navarre, had been summoned from

* It was probably at this time that Montaigne received instruction from Muret.

Bayonne, and held the Castle. At the entreaty of the President de La Chassaigne he complied with the demands of the people, and came forth to confer with them. The boy Montaigne was an onlooker, and the twenty-third essay of the First Book relates the event of which he had been a witness. Moneins advanced towards the insurgents with a kind of submissive amiability in his aspect. He ought, says Montaigne, to have met the crowd with a military bearing, full of confidence and vigour, and have addressed them with a gracious severity. Alarmed by the threatening faces and gestures around him, and also by the accident of an ill omen—for his nose happened to bleed—Moneins faltered, his voice was shaken, tears filled his eyes, and, throwing his gold chain to the mob, he attempted to withdraw. Then the fury of the crowd broke upon him, overwhelmed him, and in a moment all was over. Having chosen his part, says Montaigne, he should have played it out resolutely to the end. "There is nothing to be less hoped for from the roused monster than humanity or gentleness; it is much more capable of reverence or fear."

Montaigne was perhaps a witness also of the vengeance taken upon the revolters, and upon the city by the Constable de Montmorenci, a kinsman of the murdered Moneins, and by his victorious army. The axe, the cord, the wheel, the stake

made short work with the leaders of revolt; they were drawn by horses, decapitated, impaled, broken, burnt. Talemagne was crowned with red-hot iron before his limbs were broken. The pleasure of vengeance was extended over some four or five weeks. The wife of one threatened victim of distinction sued for mercy from the Constable; he gave her his word to spare the husband if she would gratify his passion for her beauty; she yielded; after which he led her to a window to look upon her husband's mangled body and dripping head. The charters of Bordeaux were publicly burnt in a fire which the jurats were themselves compelled to light; the privileges of the city were annulled; the bells which had rung to revolt were destroyed; not one remained to tell the hours; the citizens were commanded to uproot the hastily buried body of Moneins with their bare hands as the preliminary to a pompous funeral. It was to recover some of the forfeited privileges of the city that Pierre Eyquem, with his pipes of generous wine, journeyed to Paris as mayor of Bordeaux in 1556.

Montaigne being designed for the magistracy, it was necessary that he should take out his courses in law. The University of Bordeaux, founded in 1441, was not one of the great educational institutions of France. Its law-school had no high repute and was but scantily attended.

But at no great distance, in the city where his mother had lived in her maiden days, was a most distinguished school of law, that of the University of Toulouse. Many of its students were drawn from the city of Bordeaux. No documentary evidence exists to prove that Montaigne was one of these students, but the probability that this was the case is considerable. His writings indicate a personal acquaintance with several of the professors; of the students at Toulouse, during the period when he may have been in attendance upon the lectures, several are known to have been connected with him in later years. In 1547 the illustrious Cujas gave his first lecture in the law-school, and Étienne Pasquier, who in Paris had been a pupil of Hotman, remembered the day on which he listened to that lecture as one of the great days of his youth. Pierre Eyquem may have desired that his son should profit by the teaching of a master so distinguished. It is certain that Montaigne was in Toulouse during his early years. He met there, he tells us, in the house of a wealthy old man his physician, Simon Thomas, who advised the invalid to encourage the visits of young Montaigne, believing that the fresh complexion, sprightliness, and vigour of the youth might, through the influence of imagination, affect favourably the health of his patient.

The day's work of a diligent law-student at Toulouse in the midmost years of the sixteenth century is described in a passage of the *Memoirs* of Henri de Mesmes, which has been often quoted but which is too interesting to be omitted here.

"In September, 1545," he writes, "I was sent to Toulouse with my brother to study law. . . . We used to rise from bed at four o'clock, and, having prayed to God, we went at five o'clock to our studies, our big books under our arms, our inkhorns and candles in our hands. We heard all the lectures without intermission till ten o'clock rang; then we dined, after having hastily compared, during a half-hour, our notes of the lectures. After dinner we read, as a recreation, Sophocles or Aristophanes or Euripides, and sometimes Demosthenes, Cicero, Virgil, or Horace. At one o'clock to our studies; at five back to our dwelling-place, there to go over and verify passages cited in the lectures, until six. Then supper, and after supper we read Greek or Latin. On holy days we went to high mass and vespers; the rest of the day, a little music and walks."

It will be noticed that the study of jurisprudence at Toulouse was, in the instance of Henri de Mesmes, allied with the study of the humanities. This was equally, or in a higher degree, the case with Montaigne's future friend, Étienne de la Boétie at the University of Orleans. Such an "intermarriage" of studies is noted by Pasquier as characteristic of the period. It formed, indeed, an essential feature of the new learning as applied to legal education. The Roman law was not to be merely repeated by rote; it was to be understood

first from the point of view proper to philology; second, from the historical point of view; and again to a certain extent from the point of view of a wider and more speculative philosophy. We can hardly suppose that at any season of his life Montaigne was enamoured of studies in which grammatical discussions and curiosities of interpretative subtlety often rather trammelled than advanced the business of life. Certainly in his mature years he had none of the enthusiasm of the legist, and he regarded the administration of the law in a spirit of criticism which leaned towards contempt. He held that the laws of a country should be obeyed "not because they are just, but because they are laws"; this, he adds, is the mystical foundation of their authority. "How often," he cries, "have I done myself a manifest injustice to avoid the hazard of having yet a worse done me by the judges, after an age of vexations, dirty and vile practices, more antagonistic to my nature than fire or the rack." When a man has lost his action at law, he ought to rejoice, Montaigne thinks, as when he has lost a cough. "In a happy hour I may say it," he writes in one of the essays of 1588, "I am to this day a virgin from all suits at law."

Men speak of natural law, the laws of nature, but what are these? There is no so-called law of nature that is not rejected by the established laws

of this country or of that; yet there can be no other evidence that it is natural—so argues the Essayist—except the universal consent of mankind. To meet an infinite diversity of cases, laws are multiplied to infinity; yet each case differs in various circumstances from every other, and their diversity is never really overtaken by the laws: "There is little relation between our actions, which are in perpetual mutation, and the laws, which are fixed and immobile; the laws most to be desired are the rarest, the simplest, and the most general; and yet I believe it would be better to have none at all than to have laws as numerous as we actually have." Add to the multiplicity of laws and the variety of conflicting customs the fact that laws are expressed and set forth in a jargon the strangest and most perplexing. Glosses and interpretations crowd one upon another, and the interpretations require to be themselves interpreted: "In a science so infinite, depending on the authority of so many opinions, and dealing with a subject so arbitrary, it cannot but happen that an extreme confusion of judgments should arise."

"Why is it," Montaigne asks, "that our common speech, so easy for all other uses, becomes obscure and unintelligible in contract and testament? And that he who so clearly expresses himself in whatever else he says or writes, cannot here find any mode of utterance that does not fall into doubt and contradiction—why is this, unless it be that

the princes of that art, applying themselves with a peculiar attention to cull out solemn words and frame elaborate clauses, have so weighed each syllable, so exactly hunted out every point of connection, that they are entangled and embroiled in an infinity of figures and divisions, so minute that they can no longer fall under any rule or prescription, or any assured intelligence. . . . As you see children trying to bring a mass of quicksilver to a precise number of parts, the more they press and work it, and endeavour to reduce it to their rule, the more they excite the liberty of this generous metal; it evades their art and sprinkles itself into so many parts as defy all reckoning; so it is here, for in subdividing these subtilties we teach men to multiply their doubts. . . . We should obliterate the trace of these innumerable diversities of opinions, not deck ourselves with their variety, and make giddy the heads of our posterity." *

These were the views of one who had retired from his position as an administrator of the law, and who may have found a pleasure in multiplying reasons for his decision, but they do not lead us to suppose that even in his early days he had a special vocation for his official duties. It was, however, his father's wish that Montaigne should hold the position of a magistrate; and perhaps with this in view, and intending to resign in favour of his son, Pierre Eyquem had obtained for himself by purchase such a post in the newly-established Court of Aids at Périgueux. To obtain a judicial appointment by purchase was no irregular procedure; it had been authorised by

* *Essays*, III, 13.

Francis I., and was found by his successor to be a convenient mode of replenishing a greedy treasury. Montaigne in his *Essays* condemned the barter of such appointments: "What can be more savage than to see a nation, where, by lawful custom, the office of a judge is put up to sale, and judgments are paid for with ready money?" But he well knew that neither his father nor he had ever turned justice itself into an article of commerce.

Bordeaux had opposed the establishment of the Court at Périgueux. Under opposing influences the King had wavered to and fro. At length the Court was definitely constituted, and almost at the moment when Pierre Eyquem became one of its members he was elected (1 August, 1554) mayor of Bordeaux. There is little doubt that the position obtained by Montaigne was that left vacant by his father's resignation upon election to the more distinguished office. The young man was only twenty-one years of age, but the statutory obligations as to age were occasionally disregarded. La Boétie was admitted a councillor at twenty-three and a half years old; Henri de Mesmes was admitted at a little over twenty. The Court of Aids at Périgueux had, however, a brief existence. First limited in the sphere of its operations to appease the jealousy of the Court at Montpellier, it was suppressed in May, 1557, and

an order was given that its members should be incorporated in the corresponding Court of the Parliament of Bordeaux. The Parliament, anticipating a dispersion of its fees among an augmented body of officials, resisted with vigour. The King's advisers, after an unsuccessful effort to compromise the matter by establishing a new Chamber of Requests at Bordeaux, were resolute, and before the close of 1557 the councillors of the extinct Court at Périgueux, and Montaigne among them, were admitted as members of the Parliament. The relations of the older members with those newly admitted were at first the reverse of cordial. If Montaigne were a philosopher and no more we might smile on observing that his first public act was concerned with a question of precedence, which had arisen between the new members from Périgueux and those more recently admitted in the ordinary way—a question concerning which no person now alive need be profoundly moved. But Montaigne, philosopher though he afterwards might be, was at no time indifferent to points of dignity, and when the matter was decided against him and his fellows, he was probably as willing as the others to carry the question to the King. It was not until September, 1561, that the councillors from Périgueux entered into possession of their full prerogatives.

The duties of a councillor were judicial and ad-

ministrative rather than legislative. There were times of disturbance when the councillors acted also as the guardians of public order. The magistracy of Bordeaux was a learned and laborious body of men, but not exempted by virtue of their learning from the violent passions of the time. A few of them were distinguished diplomatists, several were devoted legists, studying the Roman law, studying the ordinances of the Crown, studying the various customs of their districts, happy in deploying at large their own subtlety and erudition. Some were zealous in philological research; some, in historical investigation; some, in the lore of antiquaries. There was a minority in the Parliament that was disposed to liberal views in matters of religion, or at least was tolerant and humane. There was a stronger party of violent orthodoxy, that recognised the sacred uses of the faggot and the noose. Instructed by the ferocious lessons of the Constable de Montmorenci, the city of Bordeaux, after the Revolt of the Gabelle, kept in general within the bounds of order; but the neighbouring districts were often turbulent, and the supporters of the Reformed Faith were numerous both within the city and throughout the province. In 1561 Bordeaux contained seven thousand Calvinists. In 1554 the Protestant preacher, Bernard de Borda, underwent the torture. In 1556 two youths accused of heresy, Arnaud Mon-

nier and Jean de Caze, were burnt alive. Terror seized the populace and even the guard; they fled, and the flames mounted around the victims in a solitude of horror. In 1559 the wealthy merchant Pierre Feugère, charged with the mutilation of sacred images, was condemned to the stake, and the sentence was carried into effect. In 1561 six members of the Reformed Communion were brought to judgment for the offence of having partaken together of the Lord's Supper. A little later the burial of Protestants in cemeteries was forbidden. At length came the Chancellor L'Hôpital's edict of pacification (January, 1562) which allowed the Huguenots under certain conditions to celebrate worship in places outside the city gates, a measure of toleration which three months later received some enlargement. Montaigne, who afterwards dedicated to L'Hôpital the posthumous publication of his friend La Boétie's Latin verses, was assuredly of the party of moderation; at the same time he was loyal to the faith of his father, and was above all a lover of order.

The edict of January, 1562, guarded, as it was, in its effort towards toleration, was yet too liberal for the Parliament of Paris, which accepted it only under strong pressure from the Chancellor. It was perhaps too liberal for the Parliament of Bordeaux. The decree was, indeed, duly regis-

tered; but, following the example of Paris, the Parliament proceeded to establish the orthodoxy of its own members by a sworn profession of faith. The spirit of the intolerant Parliament of Paris was the same spirit that manifested itself in the massacre of Vassy, and precipitated the horrors of the civil strife. Montaigne at this time happened to be in the capital. A few days after the oath—which, to make orthodoxy more orthodox, included a pledge of adherence to the formulary of the Sorbonne of the year 1543—had been administered in Paris, and before the Parliament of Bordeaux had as yet taken action in the matter, he voluntarily came forward to make a declaration of his belief. What was Montaigne's motive in thus hastening to identify himself with an extreme party? Was his liberality of temper a later growth? Was his orthodoxy the politic outcome of a veiled indifference? Was he apprehensive that the mission with which he had been intrusted by the Parliament of Bordeaux might have been compromised if he had failed to tender the oath? Did he act upon the advice of some superior friend? It is wise to confess that we do not know. Some unascertained circumstance of the hour may have determined his procedure. It is certain that he regarded the Catholic party, though not in its acts of sanguinary violence, as the party of order, and Montaigne's reverence for order was hardly

of that kind which recognises in audacities of progress an element essential to the security of order.

Montaigne's friendship with La Boétie seems to give us a pledge that even in his earlier years he was a lover of justice and of temperate reasonableness. The passages in the *Essays* which breathe the spirit of tolerance were not the effervescence of a passing mood; they were the outcome of experience, prolonged observation, and meditative wisdom. He would prefer, he says, to treat a witch or a sorcerer with hellebore rather than with hemlock; much more a Calvinist, like his own brother and sister. After all, as he characteristically puts it, to burn a man alive is to set a very high value on one's own conjectures. "When occasion has summoned me to the condemnation of the guilty, I have fallen somewhat short of justice. . . . Ordinary judgments are exasperated to punish through horror of the crime; it cools mine; the horror of the first murder makes me fear a second, and the hideousness of the first cruelty makes me abhor all imitation of it." Capital punishment he did not condemn; but death with torture he regarded as a mere atrocity. "Anything over and above death seems to me pure cruelty." To attempt to wring truth from an accused person by the rack is at the lowest "a way full of uncertainty and danger"; it is

a trial of endurance rather than of truth. And yet Montaigne, while strenuously condemning question by the rack, suggests that there may be something in the notion that an evil conscience may cause the victim to falter into a genuine confession, while a consciousness of innocence may prove a sufficient support to fortitude. He could not himself look upon the execution of a sentence, how reasonable soever, with a steady eye. The license of the civil wars had not merely indurated the hearts of men; there had grown up in them a strange and unnatural lust of cruelty, a kind of delighted ecstasy in witnessing the writhing limbs and hearing the lamentable groans of those who died in anguish. Montaigne would if possible turn aside from the sight of a hare caught in the teeth of a dog. Yet that incomparable military leader, who always meant business, thinking it prudent to hang first and sentence afterwards, that remorseless champion of order, Monluc, whose two lackeys furnished numberless trees with the dangling fruit of Huguenot corpses, was not rejected from his acquaintance by Montaigne. Perhaps the most affecting page of the *Essays*, one which, whenever she read it, brought tears to the eyes of Mme. de Sévigné, is the page which tells of the hard man's passion of remorse, betrayed in Montaigne's presence, at the memory of that austerity which had always cloaked his affec-

tion for the son now dead, dead without once having discovered his father's heart.

While Montaigne thought that a witch-burning or an auto da fé implies a high esteem for our own conjectures, he would apply a like criticism to those who disturb a commonwealth for the sake of a supposed reformation of the faith, or a political theory. Outrages against humanity, during the troubles in France, were by no means confined to the royal army or the League. Montaigne distrusted novelty, whatever pretentious promises it may make, and he believed that the great evils which he had seen growing and spreading in his own country warranted his distrust. He had a sense of the complex and delicate contexture of society, so gradual in its formation, so liable to injury, so difficult to repair, and this tended to make him rather bear existing ills than, in the hope of amending them, fly to others perhaps more desperate. "Freely to speak my thought, it seems to me to argue a great self-love and presumption to be so fond of one's own opinions that in order to establish them a public peace must be overthrown, so many inevitable evils must be introduced, with so dreadful a corruption of manners as civil wars and the mutations of states in matters of high concern bring in their train, and all this in a country that is our own. Can there be worse husbandry than to summon into exist-

ence so many certain and acknowledged vices only to combat errors which are debatable and in dispute?" * Montaigne believed that a reformation going far deeper than the doctrinal, theological reformation was needed; and it might work in quietness. How could this doctrinal reformation be other than shallow or unreal when, in attempting to remove certain external and superficial corruptions of the time, it left untouched the profounder and essential vices of human character.

For the duties of a magistrate, and especially of a magistrate at a time of fierce political and religious differences, Montaigne was assuredly little qualified either by the character of his intellect or by his natural temperament. Of this fact he can hardly but have been himself aware from the first. His absences from the Parliament of Bordeaux were frequent, and were sometimes of long duration. The Court—a centre at least of vivid life—attracted him to Paris. He had a theory that democracy was the most natural and equitable form of government; but the ancient monarchy of France was part of the order of things, and too good a part to allow Montaigne to think of its disturbance without alarm and grief. Kings are to be obeyed precisely because they are kings;

* *Essays*, I, 22.

whether they are also to be esteemed depends on their qualities as individual men. There can be no question that they are the dispensers of favours. Though he afterwards professed his contentment with a middle sphere of life, we can hardly doubt that in his early manhood Montaigne was ambitious of advancement. It is certain that he felt an enthusiasm for the capital, with its brilliance, its animation, its tides of sentiment and ideas, which he could not feel for his own city of Bordeaux. "That city," he wrote of Paris, "has from my infancy had my heart, and it has happened, as is the case with excellent things, that the more I have since seen of other beautiful cities, the more the beauty of this still wins upon my affections. . . . I love her tenderly, even to her warts and blemishes. I am a Frenchman only through this great city, . . . the glory of France, and one of the most noble ornaments of the world. May God drive our divisions from her!" *

Montaigne at this date was not the sage of the tower, who regarded the whole of life with wise and humorous eyes, a little disenchanted, yet interested in the infinite variety of things, and interested above all in observing that most diverse and complex of God's creatures—himself. He was an

* *Essays*, III, 9.

ardent and full-blooded son of the South; an Alcibiades—to whom, indeed, his most intimate friend compared him—but an Alcibiades who included within him a yet puny Socrates. Full-blooded, somewhat low of stature, a thing to regret; but sound and sane of body, broad-shouldered, built for strength and endurance; not soon fatigued by the ardour of enjoyment; dressing richly, and looking well in his fine clothes; brisk of step, sudden, and emphatic in gesture, impatient of restraint, flinging forth his words with prompt decision; indolent or active as the fit took him, in love with the world, the stir of life, the mundane splendours and pleasures; sociable, frank, joyous, and yet with a haunting thought, such as possessed our English Donne in his fiery youth, that life is short, and death is always present behind the curtain.

"There is nothing which I have more constantly entertained myself withal than imaginations of death, even in the most wanton season of my age. . . . In the company of ladies, and at games, certain may have supposed me musing with myself how to digest some jealousy or the doubtful promise of some hope, while my thoughts were occupied with remembrance of one or another that, but few days before, was surprised with a burning fever, and of his end, coming from a like entertainment, his head full of idleness, love

and jollity, as was mine, and that the same destiny was at hand in wait for me." *

This is like a picture from the Dance of Death, but from such thoughts as these Montaigne could suddenly return with an added zest to gather the roses; or at least, as he afterwards said, to plant his cabbages.

To attempt to follow Montaigne through his several visits to the Court would be difficult and of little profit, for his objects and interests as a courtier are veiled in obscurity. He certainly in his youth knew Paris—the old Paris of narrow streets, through which the courtiers rode, of flapping sign-boards, of great fortified mansions, of high-walled monasteries, of vast rising structures, the Louvre, the Hôtel de Ville, while then as now Nôtre-Dame looked down over the city, but a city of far smaller dimensions. The groups of eminent men and beautiful women—for Montaigne set much store on beauty—were a chief attraction to the Court, and nothing great or small was insignificant to the eyes of this keen observer from the provinces. He never flattered, if we may believe his own word; and, whether he desired favours or not, he never received a favour. "Princes give me enough," he afterwards wrote, "if they take nothing from me, and do me enough

* *Essays*, I, 19.

good if they do me no evil. That is all I require." He honoured the ruler of his people as such, but rather pitied poor kings, to whom all men bow, and who can never know the joy, the glow which accompany a medley of intellects. He remembered how in the sports of his own childhood he resented it if things were made too easy by his elders, and the encounter was not real but amiably feigned. Yet this is the perpetual condition of a prince. What honest instructor has he except his horse, who is no flatterer, and will throw the eldest son of a king with no more ceremony than he would throw the son of a porter? Montaigne, in his recollections of the Court, bore in mind its vexations—the waiting at doors while an usher bars the entrance, the ineptitude of courtiers, the babble of petty mysteries, the falsehoods, the intrigues, the pledges never meant to be redeemed; and, though the gentleman from Bordeaux wore his fine clothes, he perceived that your true gilded butterfly — empty-headed youths enough — looked upon a country squire with a touch of fine disdain, as a creature from another and a meaner world.

The Court of Henri II. was brilliant in all things exterior, and under the influence of Catherine de' Medici had been somewhat Italianated. Montaigne recalls the incident which he had witnessed of the King's embarrassment in failing to remember the name of a Gascon gentleman not so

fortunate as to possess a name worthy to live in a royal ear. When, in the essay *That We Are Not to Judge of Our Hour Till After Death*, he refers, with an outcry of indignation, to the beheading of Mary, Queen of Scots, it may be that he remembered having seen her in her triumphant beauty at the Court. Himself an accomplished horseman, he was filled with admiration of the splendid manage of his steed by M. de Carnevalet, first equerry of Henri II. He speaks in a way which might lead us to suppose that he was present when, in the tourney, Montgomery's spear bore down the King, and he recalls, as an example of the ease with which custom passes into authority, the year of court mourning, when cloth became the fashion, and silks were left to the citizens and the physicians. He probably looked at the pompous ceremony of the consecration of François II. at Reims; for he records how, a little later, he was with the newly-consecrated King at Bar-le-Duc, when the portrait of René of Anjou was exhibited, for a purpose; and, no doubt, with a commentary highly favourable to the house of Guise.

On the occasion when Montaigne made his profession of faith in 1562 he had visited the capital partly on public business as a representative of the Parliament of Bordeaux, partly on private affairs. He accompanied Charles IX. to Rouen —unhappy city, besieged, captured, given over to

pillage. He describes, but not as an eye-witness, the discovery of a plot for the assassination of the Duke of Guise outside the besieged city; but what especially excited his curiosity and set his imagination to work was the sight of three natives of Brazil, unwise seekers for the wisdom of Europe, who held discourse with the King, and also with the philosopher, aided by a too unskilled interpreter. In Montaigne's service, but perhaps at a later date, was a plain, ignorant fellow, all the better because of the ignorance, which saved him from the temptation to be rather picturesque than veracious, who had spent some ten or twelve years of his life in the New World, and in that part of it from which these inquisitive savages had come. On various occasions this good fellow had brought to the château of Montaigne sailors and merchants who had made the same voyage. The insatiable curiosity of the master was gratified by what he regarded as honest though insufficient reports. Among the treasures of his house was a collection of the weapons, domestic furniture, and musical instruments of savage tribes. He preserved a song made by a prisoner among the cannibals, in which the poet cheerfully invited his captors to the feast for which his body was to provide the viands; and a second piece of verse, a graceful love-song, "Stay, adder, stay," which reminded Montaigne of Anacreon. From what he had

heard of these barbarians they seemed to him to have some advantages over the subjects of a most Christian King. It was surely less atrocious to roast and eat a lifeless body than to tear it, while alive, limb from limb, or to roast our shrinking neighbour under pretence of doing God service. Montaigne's imagination voyaged forth to strange, imaginary lands, and undiscovered isles in far-off seas. Perhaps there are many such. Perhaps the happiest republic would be one where there was no name of magistrate:

> "Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
> And use of service, none; contract, succession,
> Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard none;
> No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
> No occupation . . . but nature should bring forth
> Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,
> To feed my innocent people."

For Gonzalo in *The Tempest* had been a reader of the *Essays*, and on an enchanted island might plagiarise a little with safety.

Montaigne had read of the perfidies and the atrocities of the Spaniards in Mexico and Peru, and all his sympathies went with the magnanimous barbarians. He wished that so noble a conquest had fallen to Alexander or the old Romans rather than to pretended Christians, who defrauded and slaughtered a people having virtues like those of the ancient world, Christians who

brought the contagion of vice to innocent souls, eager to learn, and well-disposed by nature. The Brazilians at Rouen expressed their astonishment that so many tall men, wearing beards, and well-armed should submit to the rule of a child, when these tall men might have chosen one from amongst themselves to be their ruler. They wondered also how it should be that some folks were full, and even crammed with all manner of commodities, while many of their brethren—whom these uninstructed barbarians styled their "halves"—hunger-bitten and lean with poverty and famine begged at their gates—begged submissively, though they might have taken the others by the throat or fired their houses. Such were the childish notions of untutored minds! All this and more of their discourse Montaigne relates, and he thinks their views of things were "not too bad". But let it pass—"they wear no breeches!" "*Mais quoi! ils ne portent point de hault de chausses*"; with which word, a final proof of our superiority in civilisation, the essay suddenly and smilingly closes.

In making his appearance from time to time at the Court, Montaigne fulfilled his part as a gentleman of distinction. It was with him a school of observation, a furlong of the field which he traversed as a student of humanity. He had his little successes, his little mortifications; but he did not

assiduously practice the courtier's trade. His manner of speech, he declares, had nothing in it that was facile or polished; it was rough and impatient, irregular and free. In all set ceremonious forms no one could be more unapt or more unready. He professes that he was wholly without skill in the art of pleasing, diverting, titillating. The best story, he would have us believe, grew dry and lost its colours in his handling. "Princes," he adds, with a touch of his disdainful manner, "do not much affect solid discourse, nor I to tell stories." He chose rather to be importunate or indiscreet than to be a flatterer or a dissembler. There may have been, he admits, something of pride in his independence; perhaps he followed nature so frankly because he wanted art; perhaps there was some incivility in addressing great persons with no more ceremonious reserve than he practised in his home. But, in truth—so he excuses himself—he had not readiness of wit enough to feign, or to escape by an evasion; it was better, after all, to abandon himself to a certain innocent simplicity of speech, to speak even as he thought, and to leave the event to fortune.

However the artistic instinct in Montaigne, which constructed the ideal *ego* of the *Essays* on the foundation of his actual self, may have retouched the literal facts, we cannot doubt that any

humorous modifications were developed upon lines of truth. His book is one of good faith.

He has given us no essay upon the duties of the magistracy, duties from which he seems to have been glad to escape. If, as he says, he was ill practiced in the ceremonious modes of address, he was wholly incapable of making a speech in public, unless, indeed, he adopted the least happy of methods, that of writing it out beforehand, and committing it to a memory which he had reason to distrust. An administrator of the law can hardly sum up each case with a "*Que sçay-je?*"—"What do I know?" And to arrive at decisions on a hundred matters about which the inquirer is not deeply concerned proves a fatiguing process to one who looks too precisely at the event, and sees every facet of every question. Nor had Montaigne any of the compensating pleasure of the magistrate who is big with the pride of place. He did not enjoy the exercise of mere authority; he did not rejoice in setting forth an array of legal learning; and he was too honest and independent to allow a doubtful point to be determined by mere temper or partiality. "However right may be a judge's intention," says Montaigne, "unless he lays his ear very close to his heart, and few people amuse themselves so, his disposition as a friend or a kinsman, his feeling for beauty or his desire of vengeance, and not motives as weighty

as these, but even the fortuitous instinct which makes us incline to one thing more than another, and which without the authority of reason gives us the power of choice between two things that are equal, or a shadow of some such vanity, may insinuate into his judgment the favouring or the disfavour of a cause, and make the balance dip." *

One pleasure derived from his position he did certainly receive, and that perhaps in a higher degree than any other magistrate of France—the pleasure of smiling gently at the infirmities and humours of his fellow magistrates; but some of the joys of irony are touched with bitterness, and under the smile we can now and again discern something of indignant pain. There was, for instance, that judge, who, when he found a question hang doubtful between such learned jurists as Baldus and Bartholus, wrote on the margin of his book " A question for a friend," meaning that, in a matter so controverted and confused, he might favour either party as a personal regard inclined him; and the essayist adds: " It was only for want of wit and ability that he did not write ' A question for a friend' on every page." And that president, who, in Montaigne's presence, boasted that he had piled up more than two hundred passages from far-fetched authorities in one of his

* *Essays*, II, 12.

presidential decisions. And that learned councillor of Montaigne's acquaintance who, having disgorged a whole cargo of paragraphs in the highest degree contentious and in an equal degree inept, and having retired for a moment from his seat on the bench, was heard in his seclusion muttering between his teeth the words of modest piety, "*Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomine tuo da gloriam.*" * Such incidents were some small benefactions of Providence for the trials of patience endured by Montaigne the magistrate.

* Bonnefon: *Montaigne et ses Amis,* I, 80, where these and other passages are cited.

CHAPTER III

FRIENDSHIP: LA BOÉTIE

AMONG Montaigne's colleagues in the Parliament of Bordeaux was one whom he placed high above himself—the "Happy Warrior", who embodied all the virtues of manhood in a beautiful and unreproached youth. It was well for Montaigne's character that his life had its one romance, its great hour of passion—four years, yet no more than an hour—brief, perfect, and never to be forgotten. And this romance was the best of realities; the passion was not the love of a woman, with its possible touch of illusion, but the virile passion of friendship, the hardy comradeship of man with man.* Montaigne had a deep and tender affection, an unwavering respect for his father; he knew that in certain points, in public spirit, in devotion to duty, and especially in the grace of chastity, his father was a better man than he. Yet he cannot but have felt that his own was incomparably the larger nature, that his was the

* The friendship was in fact of six years, but Montaigne in a memorable passage names four, meaning perhaps that these formed the period of its perfect blossoming. Yet from the first the attraction was mutual and was strong.

finer intellect, the more comprehensive soul. Towards Étienne de la Boétie his feeling was different. Here whatever he could imagine of Roman virtue was realised; intellect, heart, will—they were all above him, and all united to form a complete character, a character wholly directed to honourable ends. While he himself wavered and stumbled, La Boétie stood firm; while he scattered his powers in the chance-medley of various sympathies and casual pleasures, La Boétie concentrated his high capacities in seeking and attaining the essential wisdom, that which lives in conduct; while he was a doubter and an intellectual dilettante, La Boétie was already a well-equipped scholar and man of science. And this exemplar of what manhood at its best might be was young; everything might be hoped from him in the future. A being above himself in all things; yet an equal through friendship, a comrade, though a superior, in the pursuit of things of the mind.

To know the man whom Montaigne held in such high honour, the man to whom he gave his deep and enduring love, is to know something of Montaigne himself. M. Bonnefon, the editor of La Boétie's works, has written the story of his life at large, with adequate research and excellent judgment. Here—with due acknowledgment of the debt to M. Bonnefon and his predecessor, M. Léon Feugère—it must be told in brief.

Born at Sarlat, November 1, 1530, a little more than two years before the birth of Montaigne, son of the deputy-lieutenant of the seneschal of Périgord, La Boétie at an early age lost his father, and was educated under the care of his uncle, an ecclesiastic, to whom, as he declared on his death-bed, he owed all that he was or could ever be. Having been instructed by this good uncle and godfather in the humanities, he devoted himself with the utmost zeal to the study of law at the ancient University of Orleans, renowned for its law-school, under the eminent legist Anne du Bourg, rector of the University, afterwards a Protestant victim of religious persecution. La Boétie was distinguished not only for his rare mastery of the studies of law and jurisprudence; he was also a highly accomplished worker in the field of classical philology, and found his recreation in composing verses in Greek, in Latin, and in his native French. Like Montaigne he was admitted as a councillor of the Parliament of Bordeaux before the prescribed age. His marriage with Marguerite de Carle, sister of a bishop and of a president, seems to have followed soon after his entrance into the magistracy. She was widow of the Seigneur Jean d'Arsac, and mother of two children. The verses *Ad Carliam Vxorem*, written in absence and anticipating reunion, tell of his great happiness in his home, and of her domestic

virtues, nor have they one touch of what Montaigne describes as "marital coldness".

La Boétie was a model councillor, conscientious, laborious, regular in his attendance at the sittings of the Parliament, and winning the respect and confidence of his fellow members, as appears from the duties which they assigned to him. In 1556 he was requested to make a report upon certain dramatic performances at the College of Guyenne—Montaigne's college—which, it was feared, might contain some matter of offence. In 1560 he was despatched to petition the King on behalf of some more regular mode of dispensing the salaries of magistrates. He returned from Paris successful, and entrusted by the Chancellor, L'Hôpital, with counsels of wise moderation for the more violent spirits of Bordeaux. In the same year he accompanied the King's lieutenant, Burie, a man after L'Hôpital's own heart, to the district and town of Agen, where a turbulent party of the Reformed Faith was creating disorder. It was a mission of conciliation, requiring good temper, discretion, and firmness. "I have with me," wrote Burie to the King, "the councillor granted me by the Parliament, by name Monsieur de La Boytye, who is a very learned and excellent man." The object of establishing by mutual concessions a *modus vivendi* between Catholics and those "of the Religion", though the best efforts had been

made, was not really attained until the edict of pacification of January, 1562, came to abate, for a brief season, the evils of religious intolerance. On the occasion of that edict La Boétie wrote certain memoirs, dealing with the troubles of the time, which Montaigne in 1571, perhaps wisely, but unfortunately for later students of history, did not see fit to publish; they were, he says, too delicate and refined to be abandoned to the gross and thick air of an unfavourable time. We cannot doubt that what La Boétie wrote was wisely temperate in its spirit.

The words in which Montaigne refers to these memoirs were also applied by him to the famous *Discourse Concerning Voluntary Servitude* (*Discours de la Servitude volontaire*), or, as it was often briefly entitled, the *Contr'un;* but this fell in with the militant designs of the party of religious reform, and it was by them turned to their own account. Copies had been circulated in manuscript, and from one of these a considerable extract was made in the Huguenot *Alarm-clock for Frenchmen* (*Réveille-Matin des François*), printed in 1574, after the massacre of St. Bartholomew, at Edinburgh according to the title-page, but in fact probably in Switzerland.* La Boétie's complete work was first published in 1576 by the

* The dialogue in which the extract appears had previously, but in the same year, appeared in Latin.

Protestant pastor of Geneva, Simon Goulard, in the third volume of his compilation, *Memoirs of the state of France under Charles IX.* (*Mémoires de l'estat de France sous Charles neuviesme*). When, at a later time, Richelieu wished to read the celebrated treatise, it was from this volume that the copy was supplied by his bookseller to the Cardinal.*

What, then, is this *Discourse Concerning Voluntary Servitude*, which Richelieu desired to read, which was twice reprinted in a modernised form in the days of the French Revolution, and which Lamennais, contributing to the publication an impassioned preface, afterwards edited? When did La Boétie write the *Discourse*, and with what design? Montaigne himself has added to the difficulty of ascertaining the precise date of authorship. In the first edition of the *Essays*, that of 1580 (and the words were repeated in the text of 1588) his statement is a positive one: "La Boétie wrote it, by way of an essay, in his earliest youth, not having yet attained his eighteenth year." In the copy of the edition of 1588, which Montaigne

* I am indebted for some of these details to M. Bonnefon, but my own shelves supply me with copies of the *Réveille-Matin* and Goulard's compilation in the second edition, 1577–1578. This second edition appeared in two forms, distinguishable by the type. The first edition is so rare that M. Bonnefon was unable to see a copy.

furnished with manuscript additions and corrections, afterwards embodied by Mlle. de Gournay in the text of 1595, he erased the word "eighteenth" and substituted for it "sixteenth". He had at first purposed to append La Boétie's *Discourse* to his own essay on *Friendship*. Seeing, however, that it had already appeared in print, and in a volume, which, while it included documents of the other side, was essentially anti-Catholic and polemical, Montaigne decided to substitute for his dead friend's prose treatise a collection, twenty-nine in all, of his French sonnets: "Because I have found that this work has been since put forth, and to an ill end, by those who seek to trouble and change the condition of our government, not caring whether they are likely to amend it, and because they have mixed up his work with other writings ground in their own mill, I have refrained from giving it a place here." He adds, with a view to prevent any misconception of the author's character or principles, that the theme of his *Discourse* was handled by him in his "infancy" (*enfance*)—a word often used by Montaigne for "youth"—and that only by way of exercitation, "as a common theme that has been hacknied by a thousand writers". Montaigne makes no question but that his friend believed as true what he wrote, for he was so conscientious that he would not lie even in sport. "I know

moreover," the Essayist proceeds, "that, had it been in his choice, he would rather have been born in Venice than in Sarlat, and with good reason. But he had another maxim sovereignly imprinted in his soul, to obey and very religiously to submit to the laws under which he was born. There never was a better citizen, nor one more attached to his country's repose; never one more hostile to the commotions and innovations of his time; he would much sooner have employed his powers in extinguishing than in adding fuel to these. His spirit was modelled to the pattern of ages other than ours." *

It may be that in reducing the age of the writer of the *Discourse* from eighteen to sixteen, Montaigne desired to diminish the responsibility of La Boétie for the opinions and sentiments therein expressed. He wishes it to be regarded as the brilliant declamation of a young student on the general topic of monarchical tyranny, and as having no relation to contemporary events in France. The historian De Thou, on the contrary, connects the origin of the *Contr'un* with the feelings aroused in La Boétie's spirit by the revolt of the Gabelle, in 1548, and its savage punishment at the hands of Montmorenci. La Boétie in 1548 was eighteen years of age, and, according to De Thou,

* *Essays*, I, 27.

the *Contr'un* was written one year later. However this may have been, there can be no doubt that it was rehandled, or at least retouched, at a subsequent date. Ronsard, Baïf, and Du Bellay are eulogised in the *Contr'un* for having renewed or recreated French poetry. *The Franciade* (*La Franciade*) of the first of these poets is mentioned with special honour. Du Bellay had published nothing before 1549. Baïf, two years younger than La Boétie, was unknown as a poet at the earlier date given by Montaigne. The first four books of *The Franciade* appeared in 1572; the design of that epic, of which no more than a fragment was ever accomplished, had not been conceived until about 1552.*

The *Discourse Concerning Voluntary Servitude* has been described by Sainte-Beuve as no more than a classical declamation, a masterpiece of a student's second year in rhetoric. But that great critic did not fail to applaud its more powerful pages, its passages of vigorous and progressive movement, its eloquent outbreaks of indignation, and the very remarkable gift of style which it exhibits—" we feel the presence of something of a

* I recite part of M. Bonnefon's argument, *Montaigne et ses Amis*, I, 157. Bayle St. John had discussed these points in 1858; and, with a view to ascertaining the date, had considered the question of quotations in the *Contr'un* from Amyot's *Plutarch*.

poet in a great number of its felicitous images." The question whether La Boétie wrote the *Discourse* merely as an academic exercise, suggested by the ideal of ancient liberty, or whether he wrote with genuine conviction and genuine passion, having his eye turned upon the condition of contemporary France, is one of curious psychological interest. We might imagine it to have been written by some eloquent young Girondin soon after 1789. It might almost have been the work of some youthful Shelley in the days of the English political reaction against Revolutionary ideals. But La Boétie was no Shelley; he accepted the duties of a loyal subject and citizen under a monarchy which had grown shameless in vice. He was a sincere Catholic, if a good deal also of the antique Stoic philosopher. He was unquestionably a member of the middle party of compromise and of partial yet enlightened toleration. How shall we interpret his outcry against tyranny in the light of his conduct as a man of action?

A reader of the *Contr'un*, especially a reader who is of another age and another nationality than those of the writer, cannot pretend to any authoritative decision. He can only record his own impression. Montaigne, in admitting that his friend would have chosen to be born in Venice rather than in Sarlat, seems to imply that La Boétie was a theoretical republican. And the

work of a theoretical republican the *Contr'un* surely is. But a theoretical republican may be a loyal citizen under an established monarchy. At the same time he may hold up before himself and others an ideal of a better and happier state, not in the belief that it lies within the range of what we term practical politics, but partly as a prophecy, and partly as a guiding light to conduct in the limited sphere of what is practicable. A high enthusiasm for the abstraction "liberty" may condense itself—and to good purpose—into some counsel of wise moderation in the little matters of the day or the hour.

La Boétie expressly dismisses from consideration the question of the relative merits of other forms of government as compared with a monarchy. He proclaims his belief that the kings of France have always been so good in peace, so valiant in war, that, apart from any hereditary right, they would seem to have been chosen by God to be the rulers of his people. It was open to others, if they should please, to give to this profession an ironical significance, and undoubtedly the whole tendency of the *Discourse* was to arouse a critical spirit with reference to monarchical government. The *Contr'un* is the cry of a young and ardent spirit against the tyranny of the One over the Many; the cry of a lover of humanity on behalf of freedom, of freedom as a natural right, and one

which reason justifies. All men are born free and equal, equal at least in the essential things, and yet almost all men find themselves enchanted, and bound in a voluntary servitude. The *Discourse* is the expansion of this and of one or two other ideas. It is often rhetorical, often declamatory; but a writer, and especially a writer who is young, may be at the same time declamatory and very much in earnest. The advantage as well as the disadvantage of youth often lies in the dominating power of a few simple ideas, which to one experienced in dealing with concrete affairs may seem somewhat hollow, yet which prove to be powers with mankind.

How is this, cries La Boétie, that an infinite number of men are not governed but tyrannised over by one man, not a Hercules, not a Samson, rather a poor mannikin, often the most cowardly and effeminate creature in the nation, unaccustomed to the dust of battle, scarcely even acquainted with the sands of the tilting-field; one incapable of commanding men by native force, but lost in vile submission to the meanest and silliest creatures of the other sex? So La Boétie declaims. Is it that men are cowards? Can it be that millions of men fear such a feeble being as this? Such a notion is incredible. The vice which induces men to be slaves must be another and a baser vice than cowardice. To effect the down-

fall of a tyrant no struggle is required. To disregard him, to leave him isolated and therefore powerless is enough. The nation that accepts servitude is in truth its own enslaver. In order to possess freedom men have but to desire it.

Has Nature, then, whose purposes are so beneficent, and who has implanted in our breasts desires for all things that we need, has she erred in one point, and left us with so feeble a desire for freedom that it can be extinguished by the first breath of unpropitious chance? Men are pillaged, their sons are despatched to the shambles of tyrannic wars, their daughters are betrayed to gratify the royal sensuality, and yet men refuse to be free. The tyrant, who thus abuses them, has but two eyes, two hands, and one body, while they are the myriads of a hundred cities, of a thousand fields. Let them but resolve to cease from servitude, let them merely refuse to sustain this oppression, and it will totter, fall, and be shattered like a colossus whose base has been removed.

There exists in every soul of man a ray of the light of reason, which is the gift of Nature. And nothing is more manifest than that Nature designed man for freedom. Men are all fashioned in the same mould, compounded of the same clay, in order that they may know that they are brethren. Equality is the true ground of fraternity; or if one man be born with certain gifts superior

to those of another, these endowments are granted only that he may the better serve his fellows. And as fraternity rests upon equality, so liberty, in the order of Nature, rises from the foundation of both of these. Over his equal and his brother no man can naturally desire to lord it. Even the beasts themselves will fight to maintain their freedom; even the beasts themselves languish in servitude. What freeborn people, except it be the people of Israel, who petitioned for a king, would yield to slavery unless it were imposed upon them by force or by fraud? Too often, indeed, the fraud has been of their own devising; they have laboured to deceive themselves; until, as years roll on, the later generations lose the very memory of freedom, lose the very consciousness of servitude, and accept their miserable condition as an unalterable natural fact.

It is custom, then, which lies upon us like a frost of death; it is custom which proves itself to be stronger than nature. The most wicked citizen of Venice could never wish to be a king; the most noble-minded citizen born under the rule of the Turk could hardly imagine freedom in his dreams. An infant in the country of the Cimmerians, brought forth during the six months of darkness, how could eyes of his conceive or desire the light of the sun? Yet under the worst despotism some few finely-constituted souls, one here

and another there—some student among his books, some young man enamoured of antique ideals—feel the weight of the yoke, and long to be emancipated from it. They are, however, so isolated that each cannot discover his fellows, and each alone is helpless. Nevertheless, bold enterprises on behalf of freedom, for which a few courageous spirits are gathered together, concerned for liberty and careless of self-aggrandisement, are seldom fruitless of good.

Add to the deadening influence of custom in perpetuating a voluntary servitude the fact that under a despotism men lose their virtue, their valiance, their gladness in the contest, and, growing cowardly and effeminate, they cease to be capable of great things. The tyrant, well aware of this, "sugars servitude with an envenomed sweetness"; he turns the nation away from the career of arms; surrounds himself with foreign mercenaries; amuses his subjects with theatres, sports, farces, spectacles, gladiators, strange beasts, medals, pictures, and other like seductive anodynes. Meanwhile the bribed populace holds its true friends in suspicion, and leans trustfully towards its betrayer. Give largess to the greed of the populace, and it will not quit its trough to acquire the liberty of Plato's republic. Nor are the bribes only of a material kind; the soul receives its pious sops; religion itself is converted

into the patron and defender of tyranny. The King is a sacred, secluded, unapproachable person; or he comes forth, as a minister of heaven, to work miraculous cures and to impose upon the superstition of the adoring crowd.

Some persons may erroneously imagine that the power of a tyrant resides in his guards, his archers, his armed footmen, his troops of cavalry. No; his business is achieved for him by four or five, or some half-dozen agents, the accomplices of his cruelty, or pandars of his pleasures. Six hundred others profit by these six; six thousand, by the six hundred; and thus, in the end, millions are attached by a chain, like the chain of Jupiter, to the tyrant's throne. His subjects are ingeniously and successfully employed to enslave one another. But, alas! for the life of a despot's favourite, a life to be wondered at for its wickedness, and often to be pitied for its folly. The peasant, bound to the furrow, is freer than such an one, who is not even the master of his own thoughts. His end is destruction, either at the hands of his lord or of that lord's successor. Nor is the tyrant's own lot an enviable one; it is haunted by suspicion and filled with secret alarms; it is condemned to solitude, for with him the basis of true comradeship or friendship does not exist.

"Friendship," writes La Boétie, "is a sacred name, it is a holy thing; it never subsists except between persons of

true worth; it arises from mutual esteem alone; it is maintained not so much by any profit as by a life that is excellent. That which gives a friend assurance of his fellow is the knowledge of his integrity; the pledges he proffers are goodness of nature, faith, and constancy. Where there is cruelty, where there is disloyalty, where there is injustice, friendship cannot be. Between evil men, when they gather together, there may be a complot; companionship there can be none; there is mutual fear, not mutual support; such men are not friends but accomplices."

Such reduced to narrow dimensions, which do not admit of Greek or Roman or Persian authorities, examples, and anecdotes—the fashion of the Renaissance—but with something of its declamatory tone preserved, is the *Discourse Concerning Voluntary Servitude*, and this *Discourse* it was, which, read in a manuscript copy before he had made acquaintance with the author, first attracted Montaigne to the writer. The analysis of the sources of a despot's power is much more than mere declamation. In its spirit the little treatise curiously resembles the temper of Shelley when he wrote *The Revolt of Islam*, but the part of Cythna in revolutionary emancipation had not yet been conceived. Was it likeness or unlikeness that drew Montaigne to La Boétie? "The *Discourse* was shown to me," Montaigne writes, "long before I had seen him, and it gave me my first acquaintance with his name, thus preparing the way for the friendship which we cherished as

long as God willed, a friendship so entire and so perfect that certainly the like is hardly to be found in story, and amongst modern men no sign of any such is seen. So many things must concur to build up such a fabric that it is much if fortune should bring the like into existence once in three ages." *

La Boétie, whose philological studies connected him with scholars, whose French verses might naturally bring him into relation with the writers soon to be the luminaries of the Pleiad, seems to have had a genius for friendship. To his fellow student in law and in the humanities at Orleans, Lambert Daneau, he addresses some verses which tell of the maturity of Daneau's mind under the appearance of his flourishing youth. Montaigne's biographer, M. Bonnefon, imagines the two young men pacing to and fro among the quincunxes and arbours of the garden which Antoine Brachet, Daneau's uncle, himself a scholar and something of a poet, possessed in the outskirts of Orleans. If this is no fancy, it is to be feared that the early friendship was sundered by religious differences, for Daneau in later years became an ardent combatant with the pen upon the side of the Reformed Faith. † The poet

* *Essays*, I, 27.

† M. Bonnefon conjectures that La Boétie's *Discourse* may have been written at the University of Orleans, that

Baïf was certainly a friend of La Boétie, and he could not fail to communicate to one who was himself a poet some of the aspirations and designs of the Pleiad. With another member of that brilliant group, the Hellenist Jean Dorat, he must also have been acquainted, for he composed a moralising Latin distich *On the Horologe of Marguerite de Laval*, and Marguerite was Dorat's first wife. There are words in the *Contr'un* which may, indeed, refer only to the grace of Ronsard's verses, but which suggest a personal acquaintance. La Boétie came forward with a spirited defence of the great poet, when one of his fellow councillors of Bordeaux maintained that Ronsard would be better employed in singing the praises of God than those of earthly love. There are many more ways of praising God than one, declares La Boétie in his Latin epigram; let Ronsard celebrate Him in his own divine verse; the councillor, Gaillard de Laval, may, for his part, praise God hardly less by silence. The enthusiastic admiration of "the great La Boétie",

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the influence of Anne du Bourg may have assisted in its inspiration, and that it may have reached the Huguenots through Lambert Daneau. The "Longa", addressed in the *Discourse*, has been identified by M. Dezeimeris as Guillaume de Lur, a councillor first of Bordeaux, afterwards of Paris, a lover of letters, the friend of Rabelais and of Buchanan.

a man "possessing every gift", one who "will surpass in every direction what is hoped from him", expressed by the eminent scholar Julius Cæsar Scaliger is only one more proof of the universal esteem in which he was held by his contemporaries.*

The desire for mutual acquaintance was common to La Boétie and Montaigne. "We sought each other before we met, and by the reports we heard one of another, which wrought upon our affection more than in reason reports should do, I think by some secret ordinance of Heaven." At length, by accident at some great city entertainment, they found each other. Montaigne was in an unusual degree open to the impression of personal beauty, and La Boétie's face was not beautiful, in the common acceptation of that word. It might even be called the reverse of beautiful, but the irregularity of features was of that kind which Montaigne describes as a superficial lack of beauty; it had a character which imposed itself decisively on the observer, yet one about which men's opinions may differ, one certainly which does not react in any prejudicial way upon the disposition of its possessor's mind. Not for a moment was any check interposed in the swift

* See Bonnefon's *Montaigne et ses Amis*, I, 210; and Dezeimeris, *De la Renaissance des Lettres à Bordeaux au XVIe siècle.*

approach of spirit to spirit and heart to heart: "We found ourselves so mutually taken with one another, so well acquainted, so bound by obligations each to the other, that thenceforward nothing was as near us as each was to each." The feeling had its springs in something deeper than any reason that could be assigned to explain it. The essential reason was, as Montaigne puts it in a celebrated phrase—"*Parce que c'estoit luy; parce que c'estoit moi*"—"*Because it was he; because it was I.*"

In this alliance La Boétie was the Horatio, with blood and judgment well commingled; already in harmony with himself and his ideals of duty. Montaigne was the Hamlet, greater by intellect, and imagination, and manifold sympathies, but still with powers unharmonized; less steadfast and indomitable of will, and by no means foursquare in complete moral rectitude. The conditions of a perfect friendship, absolute unity and absolute independence, seem to have been fulfilled in the highest possible degree. A soft, assenting, yielding image of himself—himself upon a lesser scale—would have left Montaigne indifferent, or would have teased him out of patience. He enjoyed the contest of intellects, the encounter of various moods. But underneath that diversity which made the commerce of mind with mind interesting and profitable, lay a union that was far

more than any community of tastes and interests, a union that had in it something almost of mystical passion, measureless truth, a calm with a radiance at its centre, a deep security, as if rest had been found, and were sustained on those eternal pillars which upbear the heaven and the earth. Montaigne, the sceptic, the egoist, as he is called, —and, in truth, he had something of each in his composition—describes this friendship in such words as are usually reserved for the exaltations of religious ardour; the varied interests which make up friendship melt together into "I know not what quintessence which, having seized all my will, led it to plunge and lose itself in his; which, having seized all his will, led it to plunge and lose itself in mine with an equal hunger and concurrence. I may indeed say 'lose', for nothing, his or mine, was reserved as part of a separate and peculiar existence."

Among La Boétie's Latin poems are three addressed to his friend, and it is clear from these that the elder brother—for the name of "brother" was accepted by them, with a deeper meaning than that of mere kinship—gave of his best to the younger by assuming a certain authority over him as what we may style the guardian of his virtue. In one of these poems the name of Jean de Belot, another friend of La Boétie, is associated with that of Montaigne. It expresses a mood of

fatigue and despondency in the writer caused by the perpetually renewed troubles of France. We hear La Boétie's sigh for what Southey and Coleridge afterwards imagined as a Pantisocracy on the banks of the Susquehanna. These strange lands, these vast new realms discovered by seamen across the main, do they not invite a weary man to peaceful fields and happier duties? And yet even there the thought of his country's ruin would pursue him. Of the verses addressed to Montaigne alone, one is lyrical; it is a summons to the choice of the better and the harder way, the way not of pleasure transitory and meretricious, but of labour and duty with the loins girt and the lit lamp:

"To labour nothing Jove denies,
For he the overhanging skies,
The wandering waves, the land,
Rules with no easeful hand.

"What state is his who toileth not?
Sunk in long sleep, of men forgot,
Buried he draws his breath,
Foretasting his own death."

Such is the spirit of La Boétie's call to duty. Passionate at times in the pursuit of pleasures, Montaigne at other times revived in manhood the feeling of some who had known him in his schoolboy days; the boy, they supposed, was not likely to do much that was ill, but would he do anything

that was good? Through his superficial indolence or nonchalance Montaigne's energy of intellect and heart were discerned by La Boétie; he had faith in great, untold possibilities of good; he summoned his younger comrade to show himself for what he really was; and if gratitude were permissible between such friends as these, Montaigne could not but feel grateful to one who knew him aright and who constrained him to be loyal to his better self.

"He wrote," says Montaigne, "an excellent Latin satire, which has been published, in which he excuses and explains the precipitancy of our mutual intelligence, coming, as it did, so suddenly to perfection. Having so short a term of duration, having begun so late (for we were both men full-grown, and he some years the elder), there was no time to lose, nor were we bound to conform to the pattern of those soft, regular friendships which require so many precautions of long, anticipatory converse." The "Latin satire" is the third of La Boétie's poems addressed *Ad Michaelum Montanum*. It tells in the opening lines of that swift mutual intelligence between the two friends which is referred to by the Essayist. Many of those who are named prudent—so the poem begins—hold in suspect a friendship that has not been tried by years, and by the stress and strain of life:

"But us a love scarce elder than a year
Joins, and already love is at the full.

. . . . . .

"Nor do I fear, let but the fates be kind,
That they, our children's children, will decline
To write our names in that illustrious roll
Of famous friends."

Some trees refuse to be grafted with certain others; and again some trees accept the graft on the instant, through an occult kinship of nature; in a moment of time the buds swell and cohere, and with a single desire conjoin to bring forth fruit:

"Thee, thee, Montaigne, through every chance and change,
Nature omnipotent hath joined with me,
Nature, and that most dear constraint of love—
Virtue."

And so La Boétie passes on to his lessons and exhortations as to conduct, warning his friend against the special dangers of his own temperament, and holding up before his imagination the virile joys of self-restraint, and the happiness of the hearth and home.

In his essay on *Friendship* Montaigne compares the love of friend for friend with the other chief alliances of heart with heart, and gives to friendship the place of pre-eminence. The relation of a son to a father may be of great beauty in its kind—and no one had a more gracious father

than he—but a father cannot communicate all his secret thoughts to a son, nor can a son reprove his father, while reproof is one of the most valuable offices of a perfect friendship. The interests of brothers are often detached or even opposed; they jostle and hinder each the other. And a man's father or his brother may happen to be of a humour quite contrary to his own. The passion for a woman is, indeed, a more active and eager fire than the temperate affection of friends, but its flame is less steady and constant. In marriage, when it has once been entered on, there is a sense of constraint and even compulsion. Montaigne in the essay on *Experience* describes himself as so enamoured of freedom that were he interdicted from access to some corner of the Indies, it would take from him a little of his ease. Moreover, marriage, a bargain seldom based merely on affection, includes many subordinate interests and relations which may tangle and intertwist disagreeably with the chief relation. Nor are women often capable of that equal communication with a man which is essential to a high and enduring friendship. Yet Montaigne can imagine a marriage, freely contracted, founded upon love alone, in which the soul might have entire fruition, and the soul's companion, the body, might also have its part in the alliance; and such a marriage, he asserts, would in truth be the most full and per-

fect form of friendship. Only, he adds, "it is without example that this sex has ever yet arrived at such perfection." La Boétie was not merely of what Montaigne esteemed the nobler sex, he was the greatest and noblest among the men of his time: "The greatest spirit I ever knew, I mean for the natural parts of the soul, and the best endowed, was Stephen de La Boétie; his was, indeed, a full soul, showing in every way an aspect of beauty; a soul of the old stamp, and one which would have produced great effects, had his fortune so pleased, seeing that to those great natural parts he had added much by learning and study."* With such a friend mere good offices and mutual benefits, which are the supports of ordinary friendship, did not deserve so much as to be mentioned. Between such a pair of friends there could be no lending nor borrowing, no giving nor taking; or, if one gave to the other, the receiver of the benefit was he who conferred the greater obligation of the two. This passion, so high and virile, was an unique experience for each friend, standing single and alone, and could never be repeated in the life of the survivor. In the history of many men there has been some supreme event which seems to interpret the secret of existence, which divides the cloud of custom, and gives

* *Essays*, II, 17.

a higher meaning to the whole of life. With one man it is religious conversion; with another it is some heroic act of obedience to duty or of self-surrender; with another it is the love of a woman. With Montaigne it was his friendship with Étienne de La Boétie.

The last act of La Boétie's public life, of which we are aware, was that of a guardian of public order. The Huguenots in the neighbourhood of Bordeaux, undeluded by the specious calm which followed the edict of January, 1562, had seized upon Bergerac, and it was feared that they might attempt to surprise Bordeaux itself. In December of that year twelve hundred men of the city were enrolled to secure its safety and quiet. Twelve councillors of the Parliament were placed in command of these centuries of citizen soldiers. Among the officers of this hastily organized body of guards La Boétie was one.

The end came unexpectedly. The record of La Boétie's last illness and dying hours is given in the extract from a letter of Montaigne to his father, written probably soon after the first days of sorrow, but not printed until certain of the writings of Montaigne's dead friend were issued in 1571 under his own superintendence. The incidents are told from day to day, almost from hour to hour, with a sense of deep responsibility for accuracy of statement. The writer would not

willingly alter or lose anything of what was all so rare and precious; he would make the reader as far as possible a witness of the event; he writes with restrained tenderness, yielding to no extravagant outbreaks of feeling, which would only obscure the central figure of the narrative, and would be out of harmony with his friend's grave temperance and self-possession. Montaigne has never elsewhere written with such a dignified simplicity.

The death-bed, which he stood by day after day, was that of a sage who was also a Christian. Never was the process of dying more free from unreality, more full of genuine dignity:

> "No weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise or blame; nothing but well and fair,
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble."

During all his years La Boétie had enjoyed vigorous and uninterrupted health. On August 9, 1563, when returning from the courts of law, Montaigne sent to his friend, inviting him to dinner. The answer was that La Boétie was not quite well, and would be pleased if Montaigne would come and spend an hour with him before he started for "Medor" (? Médoc). When Montaigne called, he found La Boétie lying down but not undressed, and looking much altered in appearance; he stated that he had caught a chill, as

he supposed, while at play with M. d'Escars. The plague was in Bordeaux, and Montaigne urged upon his friend that he should avoid the infected air by quitting the city, but not venture farther than the village of Germignan, two leagues to the northeast. The advice was followed, and La Boétie was accompanied by his wife and his good uncle and namesake, the curé of Bouillonnas.

Early next morning Montaigne heard from Mme. de La Boétie * that her husband was suffering from a violent attack of dysentery. A physician had been called in. Montaigne hastened to his friend, who was delighted to see him, and begged him to sacrifice in such attendance as much time as might be possible. The anxious wife with tears entreated Montaigne to stay for the night. On Saturday, La Boétie, supposing that his malady might be in some slight degree contagious, and perceiving a depression which Montaigne could not conceal, begged him not to remain constantly with him, but to come now and again, and, indeed, as often as circumstances would permit. "From that time forward," Montaigne writes, "I never left him."

* She is styled Mademoiselle, as was also Montaigne's wife. The wives of persons of high rank and also of a humble position were called Madame. In an intermediate social position Mademoiselle was customary with married women.

The stages of increasing weakness, the testamentary arrangements, the words of affection, of resignation, of unalterable equanimity are all duly placed on record by Montaigne. For the sake of his wife and uncle, La Boétie at first concealed the assurance he had that recovery was hardly to be expected. In their presence he seemed even gay. He grieved on his wife's account and his friend's that he must depart; as for himself, his chief regret was that the opportunity he had anticipated of doing some good work for his fellows and for his country was not to be granted him: "Possibly, my brother, I was not born so useless but that I might have found means of rendering some service in public affairs." Having explained the arrangements which he proposed to make with respect to his worldly goods, he went on to express his deep gratitude to the uncle who had been as a father to him, and his entire joy in the wife whom he addressed by that favorite name he had chosen for her, "*Ma semblance*"—"my likeness," "my image." Then, turning to Montaigne, he spoke: "My brother, whom I love so dearly, and whom I have chosen from among so many men with you to revive that virtuous and sincere friendship, the habit of which has through men's vices been so long estranged from among us that only some old traces of it remain in the memorials of antiquity, I beg of you as a token of my

affection for you to consent to be the inheritor of my library and my books, which I give you, a very little gift, but one of great good-will, and which is appropriate on account of the regard you bear towards letters. It will be to you '*μνημόσυνον tui sodalis*'—'a memorial of your old companion." Whereupon he thanked God that he was accompanied to the end by those who were dearest to him in the world. "It seems to me," he said, "a very comely thing to see a group of four persons so harmonious in feeling, so united in friendship. . . . I am a Christian; I am a Catholic; as such I have lived, as such I am resolved to close my life. Let a priest be summoned, for I would not fail in this last duty of a Christian."

All this was spoken with a quiet firmness. Some hours later the notary was by the bedside, and La Boétie dictated swiftly and precisely the terms of his will. Then with wise words of counsel he took farewell of his niece and of his stepdaughter. The chamber was full of weeping; he begged all to withdraw except his "garrison," as he named the maids who waited on him. Yet for a little he retained one of the sorrowing group—a younger brother of Montaigne, M. de Beauregard, who was a zealous adherent of the Reformed Faith, at a later time to become the husband of La Boétie's stepdaughter. The dying man commended him for his earnestness, his sin-

cere and simple affection for what he believed to be the truth. It was easy to understand how one should think as he did, seeing the disorder that had crept into the Church, and the vicious lives of prelates. La Boétie would not discourage him from following the dictates of his conscience. All he begged was that M. de Beauregard should temper his zeal with discretion, and that, as far as was possible, he should not permit differences with respect to religion to disturb the unity of his father's household. Montaigne's brother thanked his kind monitor heartily and withdrew.

Why trace farther the progress of La Boétie's decline? Having confessed, and received the sacrament, and again made profession of his faith, he lay in great weakness, no longer, as he said, a man, but the similitude of a man—*non homo sed species hominis*—suffering much, yet possessed with anticipations "wonderful, infinite, and ineffable". When he bade his wife a last farewell, repeating the name of old affection, "*Ma semblance,*" he tried to retract his word "I am going away", which alarmed her, by turning it into a simple good-night: "Good-night, my wife; go thy way." He begged his friend to keep close to him. For a while his mind seemed to hover between dreams and realities; then came a deceptive lightening before death. He appeared to rest, and Montaigne left the chamber to rejoice with

Madame de La Boétie. "About an hour afterwards," continues the narrator, "naming me once or twice, and heaving a long sigh, he gave up the ghost, towards three o'clock on Wednesday morning, the eighteenth of August, fifteen hundred and sixty-three, having lived thirty-two years, nine months, and seventeen days."

There have been deaths more rapturous than La Boétie's, deaths in which dying seems but the incident of a moment in some advance upon a great end. There has been no death of more calm deliberation, more dignified tenderness. It was, indeed, touched with the light of Christian hope. But as a grave withdrawal and leave-taking it resembled those beautiful classic reliefs in which a tranquil, pathetic, and, in the old sense of the word, decent farewell is represented—the son taking the parent's hand for the last time, the husband withdrawing from the wife, or friend parting from friend. The gift to Montaigne of the books which La Boétie cherished was much, but the most precious bequest was the memory of such a life and of such a death. The thought of death had haunted Montaigne even in the midst of his mundane pleasures. Now he had seen what it is for a gentleman, a scholar, a philosopher, and a Christian to die. It made life more intelligible. Perplexed enough it still might be; but here was something steadfast, something really ascer-

tained, on which he could lean, and by which he could support himself.

Writing many years after his loss, Montaigne declared that, though he had passed his time not without enjoyment, and with no great affliction except this one, all the rest of his life, compared with those few years during which he had the happiness of companionship with La Boétie, seemed nothing but a smoke or an obscure and tedious night: "From the day that I lost him I have only dragged on in a languishing way, and the very pleasures that offer themselves to me, instead of consoling me, redouble my grief for his loss; we were halves throughout; it seems to me that I defraud him of his part." In 1581, nearly a score of years after his friend's death, Montaigne was at the Baths of Lucca; and ailing somewhat, yet full of the spirit of untiring curiosity, which made every place interesting. Suddenly the cloud of his early loss overshadowed him, and all the sunlight was blotted from the day: "While I was writing that same morning to M. Ossat," he enters in his journal, "I fell thinking of M. de La Boétie, and I remained in this mood so long that I sank into the saddest humour." So shaken was Montaigne by the long reverberations of his sorrow.

CHAPTER IV

FROM LA BOÉTIE'S DEATH TO 1570

MONTAIGNE'S first duty, after the death of his friend, was to offer such consolation as he could, in accordance with the dying injunction of La Boétie, to the afflicted widow. He did not oppose the outflow of her grief; he rather let it have its course at first. He did not quote Cleanthes or Chrysippus, but let her weep without the poor styptic of philosophical phrases. Taking part with her in her sorrow, he endeavoured by soft degrees to lead the conversation away from the central theme, and to interest her in returning to life. He had hopes that his efforts were not wholly useless, but those who were afterwards her most intimate companions assured him that he had effected nothing. "I had not," he says, "laid my axe to the root of the tree." Marguerite de Carle lived on in sorrow, surviving her husband some eighteen years.*

It is in the essay on *Diversion* that Montaigne speaks of his ineffectual efforts to turn to side issues a portion of the energy of Madame de La

* I think it hardly doubtful that the opening passage of *Essays*, III, 4, refers to Madame de La Boétie.

Boétie's passion. He held that real grief remains at its rigid centre always what it was at first: "A wise man sees his friend dying almost as vividly at the end of five-and-twenty years as in the first year"—words which, it may be noted, appeared in the edition of the *Essays* published exactly a quarter of a century after La Boétie's death. But other things happily intervene and distract us from the sorrow which for a time had wholly possessed our thoughts. We are often strong to bear the knowledge of a great loss; we have to bear it all our life and we stiffen our back to the burden. It is some trivial incident, a phrase, a perfume, a bar of music, the remembrance of a farewell or of some gesture of peculiar grace, that unmans us. And regarding man as indeed he is, what an infirm and variable creature he shows himself to be! Is it not the part of prudence to turn our own infirmity to good account? If our passion is running at headlong speed, shall we not fling an Atalanta's apple to it, and so divert it from the course? It is so characteristic of Montaigne, whether we like him the worse for what he confesses or not, that something would be lost by omitting to tell that, in his real and deep distress for the death of his friend, he dealt with himself as an exemplar of that infirm and variable creature, man, and endeavoured to distract his mind with a transitory passion of love. His dead friend

would have counselled him to seek for strength in duty. Precisely what La Boétie had warned him against he deliberately sought. "In former days," he wrote in 1588, "I was wounded by a grievous displeasure, according to my complexion, and withal more just than grievous; I had peradventure lost myself in it, had I relied only on strength of my own. Needing a vehement diversion to distract me from it, I made myself by art and study a lover, wherein my age helped me; love solaced me, and withdrew me from the evil which friendship had caused in me. 'Tis in everything else the same; a violent imagination has seized me; I find it a readier way to change it than subdue it; I substitute for it, if not one contrary, at least one that is different; variation ever solaces, dissolves, and dissipates." * If once wholly conquered and beaten down by any passion, Montaigne believed that he could never, as we say, be his own man again. His marriage followed La Boétie's death after an interval of two years. If any reader is so charitable, he may hold that these words of Montaigne refer to the period of his courtship. But Montaigne's courtship of Françoise de La Chassaigne was perhaps conducted in the spirit of philosophical resignation rather than as a lover. We cannot tell; and it may not

* *Essays*, III, 4.

be unreasonable to give him the benefit of a doubt.

There can, however, be no question as to the fact that his early manhood was not like that of his father, who had

> "pass'd by the ambush of young days,
> Either not assail'd, or victor being charged."

The age was one in which, as Montaigne himself says, virtue was hardly a thing that could be conceived; the word sounded like a term of some old scholastic jargon: "It is a trinket to hang in a cabinet, or at the tip of the tongue, as a jewel is worn at the tip of the ear, for an ornament." His license of manners and morals was never extravagant; it was less coarse than that of many of his contemporaries; and his judgment remained superior to his conduct. He could honour a purity of life which he himself made no serious effort to attain. He claims for himself, and doubtless with justice, that he never deceived, never made a false promise, and that, though occasionally his hasty temper might show itself, never was he treacherous, malicious, or cruel. Beauty and wit had a charm for him, and beauty in women even more than wit; yet sometimes out of regard for the honour of another, he took sides, as he declares, against himself.

In not a few places Montaigne has written without modesty or reserve; yet we can believe

him when he tells us that by his natural instinct he was fastidiously decorous. The license of his pen was in part the result of his resolve that in the *Essays* he would present himself at full length as a study towards the natural history of the genus *homo;* in part the result of a contemptuous feeling towards conventional proprieties assumed by others as the disguise of a concealed grossness of living. He at least would be no pretender. He could reflect that his conduct was more orderly than his speech. And yet he is aware that speech itself is an important part of conduct. He does not excuse his license of utterance; any excuse, he says, would itself have to be excused. He asserts that the design of his whole book is legitimate, and that this design requires such unabashed discourse; and, in fine, that he must give his lesson in natural history in his own way, not morosely but cheerfully. Nature, the wanton Pan, is to blame, not he. But, in truth, the defence is inadequate. Montaigne has neither the purity of science, to which all things are pure, nor that of art, which uplifts the humbler facts of life through a sense of their relation to higher facts. Nature, which he professes to follow, includes, if understood aright, all wholesome restraints. "The offence," said Emerson, in his lecture on Montaigne, "is superficial". That is far from being the case; superficial it is not; but

it is the offence of a large and a complex personality, to reject whom for a fault would be to commit a wrong against ourselves.

Montaigne had lost his dearest friend. He was thirty-three years of age. His father was old, and desired to found a family which should possess his estate, and enjoy the château which he had been at the pains to rebuild. It was time that his eldest son should take to himself a wife. A man —Montaigne considered—must fulfil the conditions imposed by humanity; and marriage, after all, is in the bond. It involves, no doubt, a certain loss of the independence a man should cherish above everything, but perhaps it is possible to contrive an independence within the constraint of marriage. Somehow in the ordinary course of life this matrimonial relation has to be accepted. Nothing is more useful, nothing more necessary, for human society. We must fall in with a venerable and excellent custom; we must incorporate ourselves with the race. The point of chief concern is that a marriage in its kind should be good. The path of wedded life is, no doubt, "full of thorny circumstances", but at its best it may be "a sweet society of life", rich in constancy, in mutual trust, in an infinite number of useful and substantial services and obligations. From the outset let it be clearly understood that, while marriage is not dissociated from a reasonable love, love, at least in

the sense of passion, is not the foundation on which it rests. We should not confuse and confound things that are different; to do so is a wrong alike to marriage and to love. Let us think of it rather as a form, not the highest, but in its own way excellent, of friendship. Thus alone can a wife receive her due honour, that of a helpmate, not a mistress. Thirty-three years old—it is not quite so satisfactory an age as that approved by Aristotle, thirty-five. Plato would have no man marry before thirty. Thirty-three, lying between the two, cannot be very far astray; and there are a kind expectant father and mother, and a house and worldly gear, which by and by cannot but require a domestic supervisor.

Such, if the *Essays* do not misrepresent his earlier self, were the reflections of Montaigne in his character of a wooer.

"Of my own disposition I would not have married Wisdom herself, if she would have had me; but, say what we may, the custom and usage of common life get the better of us. Most of my actions are guided by example, not by choice; and yet I did not properly invite myself to it; I was led and brought to it by extrinsic occasions, for not only things incommodious but even things foul, vicious, and to be avoided, may be rendered acceptable to us by some condition or accident. So vain is man's attitude towards things! And truly I was then drawn unto it more ill-prepared and less tractable than I am at present, after having made trial of it; and as libertine as I am taken to be, I have in truth more strictly

observed the laws of wedlock than I either promised or hoped. 'Tis too late to kick when a man has let himself be shackled; he must prudently economise his freedom." *

Mademoiselle de Montaigne may have read these words of her husband, printed more than a score of years after her marriage, and may have smiled at them, knowing how fortunate the event was for her philosopher; or he might have read them aloud for her, and if she had good sense, as seems to have been the case, and a grain of humour, they may have smiled together.

The marriage-contract is dated September 22, 1565; the ceremony was celebrated on the twenty-third. The bride, Françoise de La Chassaigne, eleven years younger than her husband, was the daughter of Joseph de La Chassaigne, a councillor of the Parliament of Bordeaux. Her mother's maiden name was Marguerite Douhet. Montaigne's wife came of an old family, distinguished in the magistracy; a family not lacking worldly means, for the marriage portion, part paid down, part to be paid within four years, amounted to seven thousand "*livres tournois*", equivalent to some thirty thousand francs, which we must multiply by ten, if M. Bonnefon's estimate be correct, to find its present value. The advocate Antoine de Louppes, a kinsman of Montaigne's

* *Essays*, III, 5.

mother, assisted in the legal arrangements, which involved the cancelling of a first marriage settlement, and the substitution for it of a second, with some slight alteration in its terms.

There are good grounds for believing that the marriage, judged according to the ideal of wedded happiness which Montaigne sets forth in the *Essays*, was a happy one. The "new shoe", to which he alludes in the essay on *Vanity*, did not pinch his foot as much as he may have anticipated. When the château became his own, and the books were ranged in his library, there was always a place of retreat from any excess of threatening domesticities; for conjugal as well as other society was interdicted in the tower. Seneca and Plutarch served as giant warders of the philosopher's freedom and equanimity. But Montaigne knew, and it was much to him to know, that household affairs were conducted with discretion while he turned the page, or meditated, with heels higher than his head, and that a temperate sunshine of happiness made bright the château. He was himself unskilled in household economy. He had acres to be tilled or planted, but he could hardly tell whether the green thing in his kitchen garden was a lettuce or a cabbage. He could not keep accounts; he scarcely knew one coin from another; legal papers, title-deeds and the like, he chose to lay aside unread and unopened. Where

he was deficient, Madame de Montaigne was in her element. "The most useful and honourable knowledge and occupation for the mother of a family," he writes, "are those of household economy. I see some that are pinching; of good managers but very few. It is the supreme excellence of a woman which should be sought before all others, as the sole dowry which serves to save or ruin our houses. Let them say what they will, I require, as experience has taught it me, above every other virtue in a married woman the economic virtue. I give her the opportunity of practicing it, leaving her by my absence the whole government of my affairs." *

It is true that Montaigne's wife plays hardly a more important part in the *Essays* than Montaigne's cat; but she seems to have been as harmless and more necessary. Is her husband's silence due to the reserve of tenderness and respect? Is it due to indifference? M. Paul Stapfer † justly calls attention to a passage in the essay on *Exercitation* in which Montaigne tells of a serious misadventure which befell him during one of the periods of civil war—the precise date he could not remember. He had gone to take the air on horseback, attended by his servants. The massive Ger-

* *Essays*, III, 9.

† *La Famille et les Amis de Montaigne*, p. 65.

man horse ridden by one of these, a tall, burly fellow, became unmanageable, and the rider came thundering down, like a Colossus, upon his master, "the little man on the little horse". Montaigne was dashed violently to the ground, was badly hurt, and for the first time in his life he swooned. As he floated up to consciousness he observed, with such accuracy as was possible, his sensations, and the thoughts and feelings that involuntarily arose within him. "As I drew near my house, where the alarm of my fall had already arrived, and certain of my family ran to meet me, with the outcries customary on such occasions, not only did I utter some word in reply to what they asked me, but I am told I had sense enough to bid them give my wife a horse, for I saw her labouring and incommoded on the road, which is hilly and rugged." The instinct of help on behalf of his wife, struggling through his own pain and weakness, speaks much for Montaigne; it was prompt, almost as inevitable as a reflex action, and as quickly forgotten as it was brought into existence.

True it is that Françoise did not create for her husband's imagination an atmosphere through which he saw all of womanhood idealised or ennobled. In his pages the ever-renewed civil war between the sexes breaks forth again and again. He flings his gibes at women, like sputtering gren-

ades, sometimes with a clumsy, sometimes with a dexterous hand. They do not all mean serious mischief. Montaigne had the tradition of the mediæval mockery of women behind him. Some women, he gladly admits, have given admirable examples of courage, of virtue, of self-oblivious love; but these are Plutarch's women, a species even rarer than Plutarch's men in these our modern days. The chapter on *Three Good Women* opens with the words: "They are not to be had by dozens, as every one knows, and especially in the duties of the married state." The Essayist proceeds to reproduce the well-worn sarcasm: "In our age they commonly reserve the demonstration of their good offices and vehement affection for the husbands whom they have lost." If they would only give us smiles while we are alive, they might laugh as much as they please when we are dead. Yonder afflicted widow has cheeks plump enough, would she but lift the veil, and such cheeks at least speak plain French. That man knew something of the business who said that a happy marriage is one where the wife is blind and the husband deaf. The passions of women are not less ardent than those of men; their virtue is not to be estimated by their coyness; vigorous limbs are more to their taste than agile brains; a brawny muleteer runs as good a chance of pleasing them as a gallant gentleman; they are in-

finitely fickle; their favours are sometimes treasons; they are greedy for authority; furious in jealousy; fond of crossing their husbands in everything; they would rather chew red-hot iron than loosen their teeth from an opinion taken up in anger; their very being is made up of suspicion, vanity, and curiosity. So runs on the indictment. Worst offence of all—they often treat the volumes of Montaigne's *Essays* as a piece of decorative furniture or as a trivial bibelot: "It vexeth me," thus Florio's translation has it, "that my *Essays* serve ladies in lieu of common ware and stuff for their hall." Was Francis, Duke of Brittany, far wrong when, on being told that Isabella of Scotland was without learning, he declared that a woman is learned enough if she knows the difference between her husband's shirt and his doublet?

Montaigne has better words than these to say of women; and in saying these, he does not look morose; he smiles partly at his victims but a little also at himself. He smiles at the professions of women that their love is wholly spiritual or intellectual. Why then do they always give the preference to young men tall and proper over a very Solomon if he be but touched with years? Yet why should it not be so? There is in us nothing that is purely corporeal or purely spiritual; soul and body should act and enjoy in one. At the

close of his long discourse upon *Some Verses of Virgil,* Montaigne confesses that men are almost as unjust judges of the proceedings of women as are women of the doings of men. Yet both are cast in almost the same mould—" apart from education and custom the difference is not great. It is much more easy to accuse one sex than to excuse the other; it is, as they say, the pot calling the kettle black."

Let us set over against the indictment of women, gathered from the *Essays,* those words in which Montaigne dedicates to his wife, after several years of wedded union, his dead friend La Boétie's translation of Plutarch's *Letter of Consolation.* His marriage for five years had been childless; then a girl was born; and the infant had but a small handbreadth of life. The *Letter of Consolation* was an appropriate gift to offer to the sorrowing mother, who would hardly have been offered such a gift had she known no more than how to distinguish between her husband's doublet and shirt. " My wife," so begins the dedication, " you are well aware that it is not the part of a gentleman, according to the rules of our day, to court and caress you still, for they say that an accomplished man may indeed take to himself a wife, but to espouse her is the act of a fool. Let them talk; I, for my part, hold to the simple fashion of the olden time; something of which I show

in my hair. And in truth novelty, even to the present hour, has cost this poor commonwealth so dear, and I know not whether we are yet at the highest bid, that in everything and everywhere I have ceased to have a part in it. Let us, my wife, you and I, live in the old French way [*à la vielle Françoise*]". The dedicatory letter goes on to beg his wife to believe in Plutarch's words for the love she bore to himself; and ends by recommending the writer of the dedication very heartily to her good graces, and praying God to watch over her. These are not the words of a misogynist, nor of a husband who, being shackled, is stupid enough to kick.

Pierre de Montaigne had not the happiness to hold in his arms his son Michel's first baby. He died, June 18, 1566, having passed by a few months his seventy-second year. His old age, up to sixty-seven, when he began to be seriously troubled with the nephritic malady which afterwards afflicted his son, had been happy and vigorous. He was buried at Montaigne, not precisely as the Essayist, with a touch of vanity, expresses it, in " the tomb of his ancestors", but, as Pierre's will has it, in the tomb of his territorial " predecessors", who were not of his own family. He left eight children, five sons and three daughters, the youngest of the sons being only about eight years old. Michel, the eldest of the surviving

children, bore the title of Montaigne, and became, subject to certain conditions, the "universal heir". To Thomas, the second son, Michel resigned the noble house, with the title of Beauregard, in the parish of Mérignac, near Bordeaux; to Pierre, the property and title of La Brousse; to Arnaud, Captain St. Martin, another property, with a sum of money. The boy Bertrand-Charles, who afterwards took his title from the noble house of Mattecoulon, was placed in the wardship of his brother Michel, associated with other relatives. Of Montaigne's sisters, one was the wife of Richard de Lestonnac, a councillor of the Parliament of Bordeaux; she had already received her dowry. Léonor and Marie were given at later dates what was due to them, when the marriage of each sister was being arranged. Montaigne's widowed mother continued to live in the château, with her own attendants, occupying perhaps the so-called "*tour de Madame*", with its hall on the ground-floor and its bedroom on the first story. She may have assisted in household affairs, but possessed no legal authority in such matters.

Montaigne's sorrow for a father whom he greatly loved and honoured may have been qualified a little by the sense of dignity attaching to his position as the head of his house. He admits that there is a certain pleasure in command—command even in a barn—command even of ser-

vants; but few persons could be less naturally fitted to enjoy a place of authority than was he. Little things broke in upon the quietude that he loved. The thought of a poor tenant's need, the report of a trespass upon his land, the negligence of a steward, the weather, which if it serves the vines must spoil the meadows, the stupidity of a servant, the ill grace with which he cheats the master—for we may tolerate some cheating, if only it be agreeably conducted—the fall of a tile, the breach of personal dignity in bustling when guests arrive, yet bustle one must if things are to go aright—each of these helped to mar some fragment of the day. "I came late," he says, "to the management of a house; those whom nature sent before me into the world delivered me for long from that care; so that I had already taken another ply more in accord with my complexion." In household affairs there is always something that goes awry; petty vexations shatter you into fragments; your clear-sightedness is itself a calamity; you try to avert your eyes, and somehow they are drawn back. Vain pricks, as of a needle; vain indeed, yet pricking still! And life is a tender thing, easily distempered. To forsake such affairs wholly may not be difficult; to concern one's self about them in any degree and to escape perturbation, is most hard. At its best authority is a kind of servitude. To become the servant of one's self, to shackle

one's self to one's own concerns, is something far removed from that liberty which is to be desired.

With one who, like Montaigne, has a profound and penetrating sense of the independent individuality of every human being, the art of command is never easy. What is right from my own point of view is right only in a relative way. My wife, my child, my servant, is a separate human personality. How unreasonable to assert that my point of view must be that of any other individual on the face of the earth! How barbarous to impose the fiat of one will upon another, which possesses the inalienable right of humanity—individual freedom. To obey is comparatively easy for a philosopher; he can adapt himself to all the necessities of life, and make the best of them. But it is hard, indeed, to widen the injustice of the world by giving a command.

It may have been about this time that Montaigne for the first time troubled himself seriously about ways and means. Beggars and gangrel bodies may have their glorious hour, like the singers by the fire at Poosie-Nansie's of Burns's cantata. They at least are free, and can rejoice in their state of nature. But for a comfortable proprietor to fall into indigence may mean not freedom but painful constraint. It is not want, but rather abundance, Montaigne says, that creates avarice. Probably when he first felt that he had

enough and to spare of worldly goods, he began to vex himself with the alarms of possible future poverty. He was now five-and-thirty, an age when the cares of life begin to weigh upon one whose temper is not imprudent. For a period of about twenty years, since he had ceased to be a child, he had depended wholly upon the generosity of his father and his friends. His means were uncertain in amount, and what he received he spent freely and carelessly. He was never more at his ease than he was then. The purse of some acquaintance was always open to him, and to repay a loan was not merely a duty in which he never failed, but a pleasure, which brought with it a sense of freedom and lightness. He lived with no sense of security or the reverse, as do so many from day to day, and his experience was that he could always be jocund, trusting to his lucky star.

Such was Montaigne's first state in relation to money. The second was less happy. He possessed money which he could call his own, and in a short time he had saved a very considerable sum. The thought of the uncertainty of riches came to haunt him. He said not a word to any one of the growing hoard, which, he thought, never could be large enough to guard against all possible contingencies. Contrary to his instinct of truthfulness, he would even at times profess that he was

poor. If he journeyed, he loaded himself with gold, and at the same time loaded himself with fears for its safety. If he left his cash-box behind, he was filled with suspicions, which he dared not communicate to the most trusted friend. It is possible that in all this, as he records it, there may have been an exaggeration of the memory, but we cannot doubt that he had troubled his own calm. He dared not break in upon his reserve fund; it lay idly growing, and he found himself degraded into its impoverished guardian. Happily his various and undulating nature saved him, and that of a sudden, from ending his life in miserly narrowness of soul. The pleasure which he had in a certain journey—probably that to Germany and Italy—taken at great expense, made him cast under foot, as he expresses it, his foolish imaginings. A third state in relation to money followed for Montaigne—one more enjoyable, and, if rightly considered, more orderly than either of its predecessors. He cut his garment according to his cloth—so the translator Florio gives the sense though not the words of his original; his outgoings just matched his incomings. He lived from day to day content to have wherewithal to meet the day's demands. He reformed his temper with respect to worldly goods. He trusted to the inward resources of his spirit as alone sufficient to confront all possible infelicities

of fortune. "If I lay up anything, it is in the hope of some employment for it near at hand, not to purchase land of which I have no need, but to purchase pleasure." It was a source of joy to his heart that he had so reformed himself in a grasping age, and before the arrival of those years of life when avarice, the most ridiculous of human follies, lays hold of many men.

A duty of piety occupied Montaigne and diverted him from worldly cares for some time after his father's death. Many years previously a distinguished Latinist, Pierre Bunel, who died in 1546, had stayed for some days at the château of Montaigne as one of a company of learned men. At his departure he presented his host, Michel's father, with a copy of a book entitled *Natural Theology, or the Book of Creatures*, by Master Raimond de Sebonde. Bunel hoped that Pierre de Montaigne, who was acquainted with both Italian and Spanish, would not find this work difficult to read, written, as it was, in a Latin which was far from classical. It might prove useful to him, especially at a time when the doctrines of Luther were obtaining credit, and shaking the Faith. "In which opinion," says the Essayist, "he was very well advised, rightly perceiving, by discourse of reason, that the beginning of this distemper would easily grow into an execrable atheism." Some days before Pierre's death, his son tells us—but

in reality it must have been many days *—the old man, having found the book under a heap of papers cast aside, ordered Michel to put it for his use into French. The task was no light one, for Sebonde's *Natural Theology* was of considerable size; but Michel had leisure, and he could not refuse to comply with the wishes of the best father that ever lived. The work of a translator was new to him; he did what he could; his father was highly pleased with what he saw, and directed that the book should be printed. Printed accordingly it was, but after the old man's death. The license, which does not mention the translator's name, and refers to the volume under the title *Le Livre des Créatures*, is dated October 17, 1568. The translation was published in Paris at the close of the year, with the date of the new year, 1569, upon the title-page. It is named, not *The Book of Creatures*, but by the first title of the original, *The Natural Theology of Raymond Sebon*, and the title-page goes on to describe the work as a demonstration of the truth of the Christian and Catholic faith, derived from the order of Nature.

* Perhaps a year. Montaigne speaks of "last year" in the dedication of his translation, which he dates June 18, 1568. But we cannot rely on such a statement. M. Courbet carries the date back as far as the time following La Boétie's death, and conjectures that the translation was proposed to Montaigne as a distraction from his melancholy.

Montaigne did his work well. The translation is faithful yet spirited, enlivened by vivid touches and phrases which are characteristic of the author of the *Essays*. Apart from the manner in which he executed his task and the dedicatory address to his father, dated reverentially June 18, 1568, the day on which Pierre de Montaigne died, there is nothing in the volume which presents the thought or feeling of the translator. The argument of the book, however, as readers of the *Essays* are aware, reacted in a singular degree and after a strange fashion upon his intellect. If his father had thought of confirming a son's wavering faith in the Christian religion, by requiring him to submit his understanding to that of Sebonde, the result would probably have startled the simple Pierre, had he lived to read the *Essays*, the longest and most laboured chapter of which is devoted to both sapping and buttressing the argument of the fifteenth-century apologist for theism and Christianity. Only by forming some acquaintance with the drift of Sebonde's contention can we adequately appreciate the destructive criticism of Montaigne.

Of the history of his author the translator knew little, and little is known at the present day. He supposed that Sebonde was a Spaniard who professed medicine at Toulouse "about two hundred years ago". On inquiring of Adrien Turnèbe,

whose learning is eulogised in the *Essays*, what the book might be, Turnèbe replied that he supposed it was some quintessence drawn from St. Thomas Aquinas. That Sebonde was a Spaniard is uncertain; he was a doctor of medicine and of theology who taught at Toulouse, as Montaigne believed; but his book, which was written for his pupils at the university, is not of earlier date than 1434; its author died two years later, less than a century before the birth of Montaigne. It was printed at Deventer about 1484—perhaps earlier. In 1551 appeared an abridgement, with variations in style and substance, by Pierre Garland, under the title *Viola animi*, which had considerable popularity as a manual for the faithful. There is no reason to suppose that this abridgement had ever been in the hands of Montaigne.*

The *Natural Theology*, even in Montaigne's translation, is not a piece of light reading; but it contains an interesting and well-marshalled argument, and some pages are written with a genuine and lofty eloquence. It was studied by Pascal and perhaps by Leibnitz; it was admired by Victor Le Clerc. The Council of Trent condemned it; under Benedict XIV. the condemnation was

* This abridgement was put forth at the request of Queen Eleanor of Austria by Jean Martin, secretary to the Cardinal de Lenoncourt.

withdrawn. Here, with a view to the illustration of Montaigne's singular *Apology*—to be spoken of later—some of its leading thoughts deserve a brief notice.

The design of Sebonde is to exhibit an argument, entirely derived from human reason, by which a man may be delivered from religious doubts, and may be led on to the love of God and his fellow men, and to all those duties which love prescribes. God has given us two books: first, the universal order of things which we name Nature; and, second, the Divine Word, which we name the Bible. In the book of Nature every creature is, as it were, a letter inscribed by God's own hand, and the capital letter is man. From these letters words are formed, and from these words a science, full of grave sentences with many deep meanings. This Book of Nature cannot falsify itself, nor is it to be easily interpreted falsely, as too often the Bible has been. The Book of Nature and the Book of Revelation agree, in all essentials, the one with the other.

By the knowledge of Nature we ascend to God. Man naturally desires the certitude of truth. It might be supposed that he would most readily find this by looking into what lies nearest to him—his own nature. But, in fact, man, in his present fallen condition, is far removed from his true self. He can best discover that true self by climbing the

ladder or scale of creatures, at the top of which stands the ideal man. Thus he may perceive his veritable being, and may even feel after that which is above him, if haply he may find it. By way of the inferior creatures, each group of these, as he examines it, being viewed in its place in the general scheme of the universe, he may advance upon himself, and then he will learn that the scale is still incomplete—that it reaches upward beyond himself and conducts him inevitably to God. From inanimate objects in this ladder of existence we rise to animate creatures, to beings that are sensitive as well as animate, and again to a creature that not only lives and feels, but thinks and is the possessor of free will. Above such a being is God, and in God man's highest attributes have illimitable scope and play.

Our understanding has in it a prophecy of some higher state than this in which we live and move. Its powers exceed our present uses; in some respects it rather mars than makes this our earthly life. Its true ends and objects are not of this terrestrial world. Every passion, every thought of man finds its satisfaction not in things of mortality but in the being of God. From man's greatness arises the knowledge of God; from his feebleness, the need of Divine help.

Having discovered our true nature we obtain thereby a standard and a test of truth. Every

creature seeks its own well-being, the joyous development of its life. Whatever belief aids our nature towards its fullest attainment, its complete possibilities, is true. Whatever opinion impairs our growth and checks our well-being is false. Thus, the belief that there is a God brings with it an infinite and incomprehensible good. The opinion that there is no God brings with it the privation of a measureless gain, and stunts our growth. Shall we not settle and fix our faith upon that which is fertile and fruitful rather than upon that which is sterile and sterilising? Obedience to the law of Nature, therefore, which requires every creature to seek its own highest development, ensures the belief in a Divine Being. Our content, our hope, our consolation, our aspiration, all remain suppressed or thwarted unless we look upwards to God.*

We are not left to guess respecting the objections which arose in Montaigne's mind as he traversed this long and sometimes tedious apology for religion. The hierarchy of creatures, conceived by Sebonde, did not impress his imagination by its beauty of order or its strict enchainment. He degrades humanity from the pre-emi-

* In the above notice of some ideas of Sebonde's book I have been in part guided by M. Aimé Martin's *aperçu*, given in the edition of Montaigne's *Essais*, Garnier Frères, 1866, vol. iv, pp. 305–339.

nence assigned to it by the author of *The Natural Theology*. He finds the understanding, which for Sebonde was a sacred instrument of illumination, to be a poor, wavering, uncertain source of error and illusion. He applies his subtle dissolvent to every syllogism of the apologist for whom he apologises. He regards human nature as it is with an ironical smile which is fatal to all our lofty pretensions. He ends with his gently remorseless question, "*Que sçay-je?*"

Yet, while he was engaged on his translation of Sebonde, there was one thing which Montaigne never doubted—that his good father was worthy of all reverence and affection. Compliance with such a father's wishes and regard for his memory might justly make a demand upon his time and patience, and the response to that demand should be dutiful and cheerful. Nor did Montaigne at this time forget his dead friend, La Boétie. It was his hope that a monument, small but perhaps enduring, might by his own care be erected in honour of that friend. The manuscripts left by La Boétie had been in Montaigne's hands since 1563. In the autumn of 1570 he came to Paris to superintend personally the printing of those which he considered suitable for publication. Errors of the press in his translation of Sebonde had made him distrustful of the accuracy of printers working without close supervision. The

writings of his friend which were connected with politics, whether partly ideal politics, such as are discussed in the *Contr'un*, or the practical politics of the *Memoirs* suggested by the edict of January, 1562, he did not intend at present to issue. But La Boétie had been not only a man of affairs; he had been a distinguished classical scholar, and a poet. He had given valuable aid to his friend and colleague, Arnaud de Ferron, in determining the text of Plutarch's treatise on *Love*, a French version of which Ferron had published in 1557. With such philological notes as these Montaigne had no concern. But La Boétie had himself translated Plutarch's *Rules of Marriage*, which, for France of his own time, had a special attraction, as is evidenced by various other contemporary translations. He had rendered into French Plutarch's *Letter of Consolation*, written to his wife after the death of a daughter. He had translated Xenophon's charming dialogue, *The Economics*, under the title *La Mesnagerie de Xenophon*, and in doing this La Boétie had no predecessor. His work was that of an accomplished student of Greek, if not that of a great master of French prose, such as was Amyot. Beside these translations of La Boétie, his Latin poems were well worthy of preservation. Greek verses, known to have been written by him, were not to be found. It was the writer's way to unburden himself

swiftly of whatever fancy occupied his brain, using the first scrap of paper that came to his hands, and taking no care to preserve what he had written. As to his French verses, Montaigne esteemed them more highly than their merit quite warranted. The title-page of the slender volume of La Boétie's remains announces that these verses formed part of its contents. Montaigne had been discouraged by the opinion of friends—among them probably the poet Baïf—to whom he had shown this part of La Boétie's work, and who had pronounced that more labour of the file than had been bestowed was needed. Whether Montaigne himself applied the file we do not know; but the *Vers François* appeared in a separate slender sheaf—of which one copy apart from the prose writings and Latin verses has survived—in the same year (1571) which saw the publication of *La Mesnagerie* and the other remains. The *French Verses* include a series of twenty-five sonnets addressed by La Boétie to Marguerite de Carle, in which, as compared with the twenty-nine sonnets afterwards published in the first edition of the *Essays* (1580), Montaigne supposed that he could detect a touch of marital coldness.

We are not here concerned with the merits of La Boétie's work as a translator or a poet. But Montaigne's general *Advertisement to the*

Reader, and his special dedications of each section of La Boétie's writings may be regarded as, in a certain sense, anticipations of part of the noble and touching essay on *Friendship*. The dedication addressed to his wife has been referred to already. While he was in Paris, engaged in his labours of affectionate duty to the memory of his friend, he received tidings of the death of his first daughter, to whom in his absence his wife and her father had given the name Thoinette. We know the precise date of her birth, June 28, 1570. One of the most precious of the volumes in which Montaigne's handwriting appears is a vellum-bound copy, mutilated and injured by damp, of the *Ephemerides* of Michael Beuther, published in the year 1551. Each month of the year, and each day of the month, receives a special printed article, which is so arranged by the printer as to leave half of the page blank, in order that the owner might inscribe in the blank spaces his own private memoranda. Montaigne's copy, first described by Dr. Payen in 1855,* is enriched with forty-one entries in his handwriting and five in that of his daughter, Éléanore. They record, under the proper dates, births, marriages, deaths, and events of personal importance, such as the bestowal upon

* *Documents inédits sur Montaigne*, No. 3, Paris, P. Jannet, 1855.

him of the Collar of St. Michael, and his appointment as a Gentleman of the Chamber by King Henri of Navarre. The autograph note for June 28 tells us that his little Thoinette died two months after her birth on that day of the year 1570. The news of his loss must have taken several days to reach Paris. Montaigne may possibly have learnt the event on September 10, the date affixed to the dedication of La Boétie's French version of Plutarch's *Letter of Consolation*, which, in words of tender and cordial affection, the editor presents to "*Madamoiselle De-Montaigne, ma Femme*". He had been communicating La Boétie's writings, he tells her, to his friends, and her he reckons among the most intimate of these. By a singular inadvertence of the writer or error of the press, the infant is referred to in this dedication as having died not in the second month but the second year of her life.*

The general address to the reader tells in a few words all that is needful about the character of the volume, and Montaigne's connection with it,

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*I venture to suggest the possibility of Montaigne's having made the entry in the *Ephemerides* at a considerably later date, when he had forgotten the year of Thoinette's birth and her age when she died. The dedication speaks of the child as born at the end of four childless years; and Montaigne was married in September, 1565. June 1569 would be not far from the end of four years.

as the friend of La Boétie, and the inheritor of his books and papers. *The Economics* of Xenophon is dedicated to a favourite of the Queen Mother, the diplomatist M. de Lansac. Much as he may have known of La Boétie's great qualities, says Montaigne, he cannot have adequately known or esteemed the man. To tell the whole truth about him, who was " so nearly a miracle", would be to run the risk of being discredited as one who deals in fantastic exaggeration. The dedication contains a hint that Montaigne might have offered something of his own authorship to M. de Lansac, were he not restrained by a sense of his insufficiency. Plutarch's *Rules of Marriage* are presented to a person of high distinction—Henri de Mesmes. Rules of marriage are for him, indeed, a useless gift; but his wife, Madame de Roissy, seeing in Plutarch " the order of her household and her husband's good accord presented to the life", may be gratified to find that the goodness of her own natural disposition has not only attained but surpassed that which the wisest philosophers could imagine of the duties and the laws of wedlock—so gracefully could Montaigne turn a compliment. But the passage of chief interest in this dedication is one in which the writer makes use of a favourite thought of Sebonde, presenting it as a reason for not disturbing beliefs which, affording mankind contentment and satisfaction,

have been generally received. Everything under the heavens, he says, employs the means and instruments afforded it by nature to further its life and render its state commodious. But some men, to show a gay and sprightly wit, have applied their understanding to the dissolving of opinions, which serve us well, and have preferred the unhappy state of doubt and feverish disquietude to the possession of a wise repose. They have mocked at posthumous fame and even at the belief in a future life. For his own part, Montaigne will go with the common opinion, as offering a great consolation for an existence so short and feeble as that of a man on earth. He will even cherish the hope that his dead friend is somehow aware of his own efforts to prolong his memory, and that he is somehow touched with a sense of pleasure. No one in later years mocked our concern for posthumous reputation more pitilessly than Montaigne. It is a palmary instance of "our affections going beyond themselves". And he at that time found in doubt, or if not in doubt then in admitted ignorance and contented incuriosity, no poison that produces a fever in our veins, but the gentle pillow for a weary head. So diverse, so undulant a spirit was his.

The Latin poems of La Boétie are dedicated to the great chancellor, L'Hôpital, fallen from power since the peace of Longjumeau in 1568. In the

Essays Montaigne names L'Hôpital among the chief Latin poets of the time. But it is rather of La Boétie in relation to the service of the state than as one who indulged in the pastime of classical verse-making that Montaigne desires to speak to the chancellor. La Boétie had passed his whole life in obscurity by his domestic hearth; yet so wisely regulated was his mind that never was man more contented with his lot. For the public service it was unfortunate that one who was qualified to be a worthy captain should have remained a common soldier; but those who have the bestowal of office must needs make their selection out of a thousand; they cannot possibly always discern the spirits of men; the advancement of the deserving, if ever it happens, is almost necessarily an affair of chance. Nowhere has Montaigne pronounced a more carefully weighed or a more convincing eulogy than in the words of this dedication which characterise the eminent qualities of his friend. The dedication closes by putting on record La Boétie's admiration of the chancellor, as a great public servant, whose rule was that of virtue, and the reverence with which Montaigne himself regarded the fallen statesman.

Montaigne's last duty to his friend was to choose a patron for the little gathering of French poems. It was offered to one of the most cultivated men of the day, Paul de Foix, who repre-

sented France as ambassador at various times in Venice, in London, and in Rome. His death was afterwards lamented in the essay on *Vanity* as a serious loss to his country. La Boétie was not, and never could have been, a poet of the highest rank, but he had a genuine enthusiasm for literary beauty, and he had something also of the accomplishment of verse. Montaigne gave what he had found, without making any selection, "green wood and dry together". But other poems were apparently at a later time discovered. In the *Essays* of 1580 Montaigne presented to the great Corisande—Diane d'Andouins—the sonnets of La Boétie addressed to his early love. They are graceful fantasies of passion after the manner of the later Renaissance.

CHAPTER V

MONTAIGNE IN THE TOWER

The leisure which enabled Montaigne to remain in Paris for so many months while engaged in superintending the publication of La Boétie's remains had been gained as the result of an important decision in the conduct of his life. In July, 1570, two years after his father's death, he resigned his position as a councillor of the Parliament of Bordeaux, in favour of one who was afterwards distinguished as a religious controversialist on the Catholic side, and the historian of heresy—Florimond de Raymond. The duties of a magistrate, as we have seen, had never been duties after Montaigne's heart. Upon the death of Pierre Eyquem, he did not hastily abandon the profession chosen for him by so considerate a father. Two years had gone by, during which he made trial of continuing his work as a public functionary and also attending to the care of his property at Montaigne. It seems as if the trial had not been a success. Possibly his occupation as the translator of Sebonde had set his mind in motion in meditative ways, and he may have dreamed that it would be a happy thing to disen-

cumber himself of alien engagements, and let his thoughts wander free. Possibly the books once La Boétie's, now his own, as he turned from one to another, began to fling their threads around his soul, and made him wish for hours to be passed in the outward quietude and inward stir natural in such delightful company. Obligations were hateful to him and freedom was attainable. He could see to his property, superintend his workmen, enjoy long country rides—for he was always happy when on horseback—and at the same time he might economise, increase what had been left to him by his father, lay by a store of money, and feel that he was independent of the accidents of fortune.

Some students of Montaigne's life have supposed that, before settling down to the life of a country gentleman, he entered for a time upon the military career, exchanging the robe for the sword. It is true that in the monument, erected by his widow in the church of the Feuillants at Bordeaux, the figure of the author of the *Essays* —a man of peace, as we think of him—is clad in armour, with casque and brassarts by his side, a lion couchant at his feet. Perhaps Montaigne's widow regarded the fact that her husband had been a chevalier of the Order of St. Michael as the chief honour of his life. The Order was founded by Louis XI. in 1469, and its members

were expressly confined to "gentlemen of name and arms". A month after Montaigne's resignation of his office as councillor the third civil war had closed with the treaty of St. Germain. The country was at peace; even if the treaty were but a snare, the country wore a delusive mask of conciliation. There are references to Montaigne in Brantôme—of a mocking kind—and in other contemporaries, which have been taken to imply that he followed at some time, at least in name, the profession of arms. Passages in the *Essays* unquestionably point to the fact that he knew the camp as well as the court. He suffered, he tells us, from the choking dust of hot summer marches; he never travelled without books, "whether in peace or war"; it happened to him sometimes to forget the watchword, which, three hours before, he had given or had received from another. And in the last of all the essays there is a spirited eulogy of the soldier's life, evidently written by one who had himself seen it: "The company of so many noble, young, and active men delights you; the frequent view of so many tragic spectacles; the freedom of converse without art, and a masculine way of living, without ceremony; the variety of a thousand diverse actions; the rousing harmony of military music, which ravishes and inflames both the sense of hearing and the soul; the honour and the noble character of

the occupation; even its hardships and difficulty." But, while we may believe that Montaigne bore arms, no one can fix a date, or name a military achievement. There is no evidence that he ever took part in an engagement, or carried off, like Ben Jonson, his *spolia opima*. In 1574 the royalist commander, the Duke de Montpensier, despatched him, as we learn from an entry in the *Ephemerides* of Beuther, from the camp of St. Hermine on a mission to the Parliament of Bordeaux. There is nothing to show that Montaigne was attached to the duke during the campaign in Poitou; he may have been summoned from his home to act as an emissary for a special occasion. It may be, for all we know, that his sword had the quality of "innocence" ascribed to it by one of his biographers.

Montaigne in his tower, especially in his earlier days of meditation, certainly liked to speculate concerning military events, and to consider them, not so much from the point of view of a military critic as from that of human prudence. Ought, for instance, the commander of a besieged place himself go forth to parley? In times so full of ingenious treachery as his own, it seemed to Montaigne to be no part of wisdom to place one's self in the power of adversaries, though he takes care to tell us that his own temper is confident and trustful. Is it just, again, to punish with death

those who obstinately defend a position not tenable by the rules of war? Was the Duke of Guise blameworthy for his halts and delays at the battle of Dreux? In answering such questions as these Montaigne calls for the assistance of Plutarch or Xenophon as his adviser. Cleomenes or Lucius Æmilius Regillus is as much neighbour to him as the Constable or the Admiral. The case of Philopœmen in his encounter with Machanidas is germane to that of Monsieur de Guise. With special interest Montaigne studied the method of Julius Cæsar in making war —Julius Cæsar, whose writings Marshal Strozzi had named the breviary of a soldier, and whose style delighted the reader of the tower by its grace of directness and promptitude, its concision and infallible sureness in rendering action into speech. Towards Cæsar as a man Montaigne had a mingled feeling; but he could not question that Cæsar gave incomparable lessons in the records of his performances as a military leader. Yet, when everything that human prudence can foresee has been provided for, and everything accomplished that human energy can achieve, the event in war, as in all else, is in great measure determined by those various, ever-changing, incalculable forces which we sum up under the name of Fortune. Fortune! Yes, it is this incalculable residuum of forces which in the final issue turns

victory to defeat, or defeat to victory. Men arrive at the same end by wholly different methods, and again the same methods lead to quite opposite results. Our judgment is confounded by the possibilities of the event. It is not only that the minds of men are so various and undulant that we can never count on making the impression upon them which we intend; the issues of action seem equally variable. Should we, for example, push home a victory? Yes, and no. To do so may lead to a complete triumph; or, arousing in the enemy the courage of despair, to some fatal reverse. Or, again, should a general disguise his person in battle? Alexander, Cæsar, and Lucullus loved to make themselves conspicuous in battle by rich accoutrements, and armour of a peculiar lustre; Agis and Agesilaus were wont to fight obscurely armed and without imperial ostentation. We cannot tell; in all things we are bandied as playthings of the gods.

In the cabinet of Montaigne's tower which adjoins his library, placed above a painting which represents a nude Venus reposing, a Latin inscription was to be seen. In 1850 Dr. Bertrand de St. Germain imperfectly deciphered the faded and partly obliterated words. Eleven years later the inscription was more fully and exactly recovered by the diligence of MM. Galy and Lapeyre. The Latin is not always classical in its

constructions, and the sense in one or two points is uncertain; but, rendered into English, it was substantially this: "In the year of our Lord 1571, at the age of thirty-eight, on the last day of February, being the anniversary of his birth, Michel de Montaigne, long weary of the service of the Court and of public employments, while still in his full vigour, betook himself to the bosom of the learned Virgins; where, if the fates permit, he may pass, in calm and freedom from all cares, what little shall yet remain of his allotted time now more than half run out. This his ancestral abode and sweet retreat he has consecrated to his freedom, tranquillity, and leisure." *

A period of life had closed; a new period was opening. Was this retirement of Montaigne an act of happy election of a manner of life which he desired and loved? Was it an act of resignation? He was not a poet of the romantic age who could find infinite charm in the solitude of the fields. He was not, like his contemporary Olivier de Serres, interested and skilled in the labours of the agriculturalist. The cares of household management were an affliction to him, or at least he came to think them such. He was eminently soci-

* I cannot accept the rendering of Galy and Lapeyre, followed by M. Bonnefon, who make Montaigne express his hope to *complete* his ancestral abode (taking *exigat* with *istas sedes*).

able; the brightness and the movement of Paris had a strong attraction for him. He believed that he was not ill-fitted by his natural disposition, his frank and engaging manner, his fidelity and his discretion, for a part in the conduct of public affairs. His memory, indeed, was defective; and that, he felt, was a certain disqualification for business. He cared for distinctions, but was not a lover of authority; and that, no doubt, made some of the common aims of ambition distasteful to him. And, then, he saw too many sides of every question. He could not be a good hater, though it was a time when a man should support his own party even to desperation. He could not be cruel; he could not be treacherous; he could not even flatter. On the whole he did not find himself qualified for success in such an age as his own. He withdrew; and the private life, which he accepted with a dignified resolution, was already determined for him by circumstances, by his father's prudence and care. If Montaigne found "the bosom of the learned Virgins" occasionally a place of ennui, there was always, if he could bring himself to pay the cost, the possibility of a journey to Paris or of some more distant wanderings.

The château of Montaigne, renewed by M. Magne, the minister of finance under Napoleon III., was destroyed by fire on January 12, 1885. Only the tower of Montaigne remained

uninjured. The reconstruction of the building by M. Thirion-Montauban follows the previous design. Though styled a château, it was more strictly a manor-house—a landed proprietor's residence, sufficiently strong to oppose the sudden attack of a band of marauders, but by no means capable of resisting a regular siege. The tower, which was made originally for defence, was hardly in keeping with the rest of the structure. The situation of the château was admirable; the liberal prospect was itself an emancipation for the mind. The main building, looking southeast, formed part of the enclosure of a nearly quadrilateral court, reached by passing through an entrance, for which the tower might serve as a protection. The other sides of the court, as described by Dr. Bertrand de St. Germain in 1850, were formed by the stables, the granaries, the cellar, and the quarters for servants. On the northeast, opposite to the entrance and the tower of Montaigne, was another tower known as the Trachère, in which it is supposed that either Montaigne's mother or his wife had her apartment. Many alterations, in the course of later years, had been effected in the interior. The so-called royal chamber, for example, occupied, as tradition told, by Henri of Navarre on his visits to Montaigne, was at a comparatively recent date divided into smaller rooms. Altogether, if not splendid, the

château was abundantly spacious, and it had something of originality, something of old-fashioned grace in its appearance.*

The tower of Montaigne, round and thickly walled, contiguous to a square tower, with connected rooms, was entered from the portal which led to the court. On the ground floor, which Montaigne reckons as the first story, a round and vaulted chamber, dimly lighted by two small apertures, served as a chapel. The stone altar occupied a niche in the wall. A fresco of St. Michael and the dragon was the pious decoration, with the arms of Montaigne to right and left, surrounded by the collar of his order. "I bear azure," he wrote in the essay on *Names*, "semé of trefoils, or, a lion's paw of the same fessways, armed gules." The owner of the château valued his arms and displayed them with pride. He thought, with a little regret, that a son-in-law would transfer them into another family, or that some paltry purchaser might afterwards appropriate them for a fictitious coat. Through an opening the chapel communicated with the first story (called by Montaigne the second), where in his sleeping-apartment the apolo-

* See, beside Dr. B. de St. Germain's pamphlet, the *Nouveaux Documents* (1850) of Dr. Payen, with its excellent plans and pictures, and Galy and Lapeyre's *Montaigne chez lui* (1861).

gist for Sebonde could hear the blessed mutter of the mass with the utmost economy of exertion and fatigue. On the summit of the tower in Montaigne's time was a belfry wherein hung a very great bell, which, with its Ave Maria morning and evening, "astonished" the very walls; yet—so much is a human being the creature of custom—to the noise which at first had seemed insupportable the occupant of the tower soon became so indifferent that it did not even disturb his slumbers.

By a stone spiral staircase the bedchamber, above the chapel, is reached. In this circular room, lit by two small windows and possessing a large fireplace, Montaigne slept when he desired to be alone. Yet the existence of Mademoiselle de Montaigne is perhaps recognised here; over the mantelpiece letters, including on M and a C—which may have signified Montaigne and Chassaigne—are interlaced.*

The second story—Montaigne's third—is the true sanctuary and place of pilgrimage. The Essayist himself shall describe it for us:

"When at home, I resort a little more often to my library, whence I overlook at once all the concerns of my household. I enter it, and see below me my garden,

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* Galy and Lapeyre suggest that *Ave Maria Casta Carissima* may be the interpretation of the letters.

my base-court, my court, and almost all parts of my house. There I turn over now one book, now another, without order or design, in disconnected portions. One while I meditate, another I set down notes; and dictate letting my fancies wander as they do now. 'Tis in the third story of a tower; the first is my chapel; the second is my bedchamber, with its closet, where I often lie in order to be alone. Above this is a large room, a wardrobe, formerly the most useless part of the house. Here I pass the greater part of the days of my life, and greater part of the hours of the day; I am never here at night. Adjoining it is a cabinet elegant enough, capable of receiving a fire in winter, with windows very pleasantly contrived. And if I did not dread the trouble more than the cost—trouble, which drives me away from business of every kind—I could easily connect a gallery on either side, a hundred paces in length and twelve in breadth, having found the walls erected for another purpose to the height I should require. Every place of retirement requires a walk; my thoughts sleep if they sit still with me; my mind does not walk of itself—as though it were the legs that put it in motion; those who study without a book are all like this. The shape of my room is circular, and there is no more flat wall than serves for my chair and table; as it curves, it presents to my view all my books ranged on five rows of shelves around me. It has three windows, with prospects noble and free, and is sixteen paces in diameter. In winter I am not so continually there; for my house, as its name imports, is perched upon an eminence, and no part of it is more wind-swept than this. I like it as being less easy of access and more out of the way, both for the sake of exercise and because it keeps me from the throng. There is my throne, and I try to make my monarchy absolute, and to sequester this one corner from all community, whether conjugal, filial, or civil; elsewhere I have but a verbal authority, and in substance of a mixed kind. Miserable, to my thinking, is he who in his

home has no place where he can be his own sole company; where he may invite his mind; where he may lurk secure. Ambition pays her followers handsomely by keeping them always on show, like a statue in the market-place. . . . If any one tells me that it is to degrade the Muses to use them only as playthings and pastimes, he little knows, as I do, of how great worth the pleasure, the sport, the pastime is." *

The "*cabinet assez poly*", which adjoins the library, was designed especially for ease and comfort. It would have been difficult to warm the larger room when the winds of winter blew upon the tower. Here the philosopher, though he preferred warmth of the sun or warmth of exercise, could sit before his fire reading or meditating. Above the entrance to the cabinet is an allegorical medallion of ships at sea—one in full sail, one all but swallowed by the waves. The shipwrecked mariners struggle shorewards, where, if fortunate, they may hang up their dripping garments in the temple of Neptune. A Mars and Venus surprised by Vulcan is above the fireplace; and separated from this painting by the arms of Montaigne in gold, on the mantelpiece appears a treatment of the familiar theme of Cimon nourished in prison by his daughter Pero. A possible significance of the painting above the entrance can readily be found. The undulant being, man, is in

* *Essays*, III, 3.

the wave of the world; but he may, like Montaigne himself, see the solid earth and the temple —yet is it attainable?—of the god. But perhaps in calling it allegorical we read into the design more meaning than it was intended to bear. Philosophy had its place in the library; decorative luxury may have sufficed for the cabinet. Shall we not take the treatment of themes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and subjects from the chase as meaning no more than that Montaigne had senses, and wished to flatter them with images which gratify the eye? His painter's mode of working reminded Montaigne of his own way of writing; the artist finished the principal designs with his utmost skill; he filled the blank spaces around with grotesques, "fantastic paintings, possessing no grace except what may be found in their variety and strangeness". Montaigne professes that in his *Essays* he had not the art to achieve a picture really beautiful and rich in colour; all he could do was to exhibit grotesques and monstrous bodies, pieced together from various creatures, without order or preparation, except such as might come into existence by mere good luck.

The rooms in the tower are floored with brick, and the ceilings leave the joists and rafters visible. The joists and rafters of the library constitute in themselves a volume of disenchanted wisdom, for on these the occupant of the chamber inscribed

four and fifty sentences, which were ever visible reminders of the conditions and the duties of man, as he conceived them. In certain instances later inscriptions superseded earlier, which, however, were not all so effaced as to be illegible. Of these sentences some were recorded, not with entire exactitude, by Dr. Bertrand de St. Germain; his list of fourteen was increased to eighteen by Dr. Payen; the final reconstitution of these inscriptions is due, substantially, to the two friends, M. Galy, and M. Lapeyre, whose charming record of their visit to the château appeared in 1861.*

The chief sources from which these sentences were derived are *Ecclesiastes*, the *Epistles* of St. Paul, *Ecclesiasticus*, the *Hypotyposes* of Sextus Empiricus, and the *Florilegium* of Stobaeus. Montaigne permitted himself in the case of some of his Latin quotations to modify at pleasure the text of his originals. His Greek was probably insufficient to justify him in such alterations. *The Proverbs of Solomon*, the *Psalms*, Isaiah, Homer, Plato, Epictetus, Herodotus, Pliny, Lucretius, Horace, Persius, Martial, furnish each a sentence

* *Montaigne chez lui* (Péregueux: 1861). John Sterling in the *Westminster Review* in 1837 had noticed the inscriptions. They are given in full, in a slightly amended form, in M. Bonnefon's article, *La Bibliothèque de Montaigne* (*Revue d'Histoire littéraire de France;* 15, Juillet, 1895).

or two. From one contemporary writer, L'Hôpital, an inscription is taken:

"Nostra vagatur
In tenebris, nec cæca potest mens cernere verum—"

("Our mind wanders in shadows; blind, it cannot discern the truth".) The mottoes to guide and control Montaigne's meditations concentrate in a few pregnant utterances the spirit which is diffused through many of the essays, and especially that essay, in itself almost a volume, which constitutes the capital piece of the Second Book—the *Apology for Raymond Sebond.* The words of Terence, "I am a man, and regard nothing human as alien from me", indicate the central standpoint of the Essayist. Another sentence, which Lucretius supplies, serves to remind us that the earth on which we move, the sea, the heavens, are as nothing in comparison with the incomprehensible universe. And what, indeed, is this humanity of which Montaigne himself forms a fragment, and which interests him so deeply? "God made man like to a shadow, of which who, after the setting of the sun, shall judge?" "All is vanity." "Why is earth and ashes proud?" Humility is therefore the duty of such a creature, a distrust of the pretentious intellect, a wise suspense of judgment: "Be not wise in your own conceit." "There is no reason which is not

opposed by an equal reason." "It may be, and may not be." "In equilibrium." Yet there is a kind of wisdom possible to man, a prudential, temperate wisdom: "Be not wise above that which is meet, but be soberly wise." "Rejoice in those things that are present; all else is beyond thee." "The final wisdom for man is to approve things as they are, and as for the rest to meet it with confidence." "Guiding ourselves by custom and by the senses." This genuine wisdom is to be attained by control and regulation of the mind: "Men are perturbed not by things themselves, but by the opinions they have of things." Let us therefore pause and consider: "I determine nothing, I do not comprehend things, I suspend judgment, I examine." If there be any knowledge of divine truth for such beings as we are, its source must be divine: "The judgments of the Lord are like the great deep."

The scepticism embodied in the sentences is not an absolute scepticism; it might rather be styled a prudential agnosticism. Wisdom is attainable, but it is a sober wisdom, the wisdom which comes through admitting and accepting our limitations. If there should be any higher wisdom than this—and the sentences make no declaration on the point—it must come to us as a gift from heaven.

Among these inscriptions of a tendency which did not seem to Montaigne to be desolating, for

the recognition of our human bounds appeared to him to be a necessary preliminary to the loyal enjoyment of life within those bounds, might be discerned in years now long past another inscription, which has been truly called an "act of faith", an act of faith that had its source not in any book whose leaves he may have turned over, nor in his own questioning intellect, but in the grateful memory of his heart. This inscription, which ran along the frieze of his library was seen and copied by the Canon Prunis, when in the second half of the eighteenth century he made the fortunate discovery of the manuscript journal of Montaigne's Italian travels. Translated from the Latin it runs as follows: "Inasmuch as he desired that there should be some unique memorial of his most sweet, most dear, and most close companion, than whom our age hath seen none better, none more learned, none more graceful, none more absolutely perfect, Michel de Montaigne, unhappily bereft of so beloved a guardian of his life, mindful of their mutual affection and of the kindly feeling which united them, hath set up, since nought more expressive could be found, this learned shelf, a special apparatus of the mind, in which is his delight."

The books of Montaigne's library were only in part the gift of La Boétie. They numbered in all about a thousand, a collection which, he

thought, might compare well with other "village libraries". But he wished to associate with all these intellectual treasures the memory of the man whom he loved best among men. While his understanding sought after a prudent restraint, his affections, in one direction at least, could not be satisfied without an expansion which led them, to use his own phrase, to go beyond themselves.

The life of Montaigne in his château is not to be imagined as that of a solitary. No one ever was more naturally sociable. The *Essays* are not a confession merely, which might be the ostentatious self-exposure of an egoist, whose sanity had been disturbed. Here the confession is a conversation, which has to be genial, and full of good temper and good sense even in its garrulity, for otherwise it will not be attended to, when the tone is not that of a rhetorician, but the unemphatic tone of a speaker in his easy chair. Montaigne was never a solitary; yet he had fled from the press to dwell with soothfastness, he had renounced public employments and the ambitions of the Court. In the essay on *Solitude* we can, as it were, overhear him, while he meditates and discourses on the life in the law-courts at Bordeaux, or in the reception-rooms of the Louvre, and that other life in the fields and woods around the château, or in the seclusion of the tower. He will not consider the old question of the compara-

tive excellence of action as compared with contemplation. The life of retired contemplation may really be more social than many lives of noise and bustle. Ambitious men may profess that they have devoted themselves to the service of the public; but, in truth, what passion isolates its votary or its victims more than ambition? To live well is possible even in a crowd; but in a crowd much evil is ever present, and the danger of contagion is great. "A man must either imitate the vicious, or hate them", and either alternative is unfortunate. The sociable nature of man is either checked and thwarted, or it is corrupted by vice—by vice which in its very nature is unsocial. True solitude, however, is not to be found by mere withdrawal from the crowd; all the evils of the crowd—ambition, avarice, irresolution, fear, inordinate desires—may pursue us into a private life, even into the government of a family or an estate. To find his genuine self, and to dwell with it, a man must sequester his spirit from the "popular conditions" that exist in the heart itself. Our disease lies in the mind, and the true solitude, which can be enjoyed in cities and in courts, though not so commodiously as apart, is attained only when the soul enters into real possession of itself. A wife, children, worldly goods, and, more than all else, health, are precious gains of existence; but our happiness must not depend on these.

We must reserve a back-shop—"*une arrière boutique*"—wholly our own, wholly free, wherein to maintain our true liberty and possess our impregnable retreat. Do we need company in our back-shop? Well, we have a mind, moving and turning on itself—"*une ame contournable en soy mesme*"—which can both attack and defend which can both give and take.

Such solitude as this comes fittest after a man has employed his best years in the service of others. Then arrives the time when he may live, in the highest sense of the word, for himself. Let him make ready for departure, and truss his baggage. Love this or that he may; but let him enter into espousals only with his own soul: "The greatest thing in the world is for a man to know how to be his own." And as old age advances, and he becomes less useful and less pleasing to others, let him see to it that he becomes more pleasing to himself: "let him flatter and caress himself, and, above all, let him rule himself aright, reverencing and fearing his reason and his conscience." To practice severity against a man's self, to lie hard, to pluck out our eyes, to fling our wealth into the river, to seek for pain and smart—all this ascetic practice belongs to "an excessive virtue". Montaigne will have none of this. It is enough for him to prepare his mind for possible future adversity, and meantime, in his

present condition, to pray God for a contented spirit.

The employments suitable to the solitary life are such as bring with them neither pain nor weariness. The care of a house and lands was found by Montaigne, upon trial of it, to be vexatious; but a mean, he thinks, can be discovered between sordid absorption in such business and entire neglect. Nor would he employ his leisure in the pursuit of literary fame; this is to quit the world in order to return to it in a roundabout fashion, or to step back in order to gain the impetus for a forward leap. The religious solitary is far more reasonable in his aims. Of his wisdom and his joy Montaigne speaks not in the phrases of official pietism, but with an ardour which, if only that of a mobile imagination, is yet genuine in its kind, and remarkable in its degree. The object of the solitary in religion is God, an object infinite in goodness and power; the soul, enjoying entire liberty, finds that which can satisfy all its desires; afflictions and griefs are turned to gains. For the expectation of an eternal, blessed life our transitory pleasures may be well abandoned: "He who can really and constantly inflame his soul with the glow of this living faith and hope creates for himself in solitude a voluptuous and delicious life beyond what is proper to any other kind of existence."

The student in his citadel has no such rapture as this. There is indeed a voluptuousness in study, but it may be one of those treacherous pleasures which at first fawn upon us in order that they may strangle us in the end. Our health, our gaiety are more to us than books can ever be, and what if books rob us of these best possessions? For his own part Montaigne cares only for two kinds of books—those that being pleasant and easy can tickle his fancy, and those, secondly, which console him, and counsel him how to regulate his life and death. He is not wise or strong enough to fashion for himself a purely spiritual repose; if advancing years deprive him of some chosen pleasures, he educates and whets his appetite for such pleasures as remain—"we must tooth and nail strive to retain the use of the pleasures of life, which the years snatch from us one after another." If this is Epicurean philosophy, at least it must be interpreted by words which follow: "Retire into yourself, but first prepare yourself to be your own host; it were folly to trust yourself into your own hands if you have not attained to self-government." Yes, and more than self-government, for Montaigne's soul had a peculiar delicacy of its own—your attainment must include a certain bashfulness and self-respect in your own solitary presence. Then, indeed, you may bid the world good-bye, may forget the fame

that lies in broad rumour, and follow the example of those wild beasts that efface the track at the entrance to their den.

In all this Montaigne is not a mere historian or memoir-writer recording the spiritual adventures of the interior of his tower. The memoir-writer he is in part, but he is also a good deal of the artist. He describes something more than a mood; he indicates a real tendency of his nature; but at the same time he constructs an ideal upon the basis of this genuine tendency, and constructs it partly from external material found in ancient writers of the Stoic school. In the population of moods which made up his mind were many others different from that which supplied a foundation—a substantial, not an imaginary, foundation—for this particular ideal.

In considering Montaigne, the lover of solitude and retirement, we must bear in mind that as a councillor of the Parliament of Bordeaux he had already during many years lent himself, if he did not ever give himself, to the public service; that he found himself ill-fitted for such duties; that afterwards, when age was growing upon him, and his health was seriously impaired, he came forth from his seclusion—which was never wholly seclusion—to preside during four years as mayor over the affairs of the city; and that all this time there lay within him powers which he employed

in a better service than that of magistrate or mayor, and not for his own time only but also for succeeding generations. Nor should we forget what a time for France that was, in which he withdrew from the strife, and endeavoured to obtain the leisure to be wise. He was in truth a great artist, and a great artist, except in very exceptional crises of events, can serve the world most effectively in his *atelier*. The library and the cabinet of the tower formed the studio in which Montaigne drew a most ingenious series of studies in humanity, and painted that portrait of himself which still fascinates us by its mysterious resemblance in feature and expression to each of ourselves, for in painting his own likeness he represented the species in the individual. Outside the tower not only the storms of winter but the fiercer storms of civil war might ramp and rage. He could not wholly escape their stress; but it was wholly beyond his power to rule the storm. Could he rule his own soul? Not even that perfectly. Could he, in an age of cruelty and falsehood, find a habitation for temperance and truth? Could he inform men as to where their real interests, their true happiness, lay? Could he by a little abate the pride, the violent passions, the dangerous follies of men? Could he bid the eager reformer pause, and first reform himself before he ventured to pull to pieces the mysterious contexture of so-

ciety? Could he tell the remorseless dogmatist that there is more of true wisdom in the questioning spirit than in his? Could he persuade men to return upon themselves before they launched forth in the exercise of sword and fire? Could he say a word that might make for reasonableness, and say this with amiable insinuation, genially, humorously? Montaigne in his study did not put all these questions to himself. He had no ambitious programme, no high design of serving the world. But in effect his seclusion was proved to be the essential condition for accomplishing his best work; and, if any justification be needed, this constitutes its justification.

CHAPTER VI

MONTAIGNE AMONG HIS BOOKS

With his own thoughts and the volumes ranged on his shelves Montaigne in his tower was provided with admirable company. From the *Essays*, with their penetrating comments on ancient and modern authors, and their innumerable quotations, multiplying from the earliest to the latest text, we can in a considerable measure reconstitute his library of a thousand books. The collection after his death remained for a time in possession of his daughter. In her will, of the year 1615, she left her father's books to the grand vicar of the diocese of Auch, Gaudefroy de Rochefort, giving him permission to dispose of them as he pleased. They had the usual fortune of such collections, which for a few years have been the cherished toys or tools of the collector—they were scattered, and disappeared from sight. Fortunately it was Montaigne's custom to write his name upon the title-page of each book. In some instances he annotated the margins, or added in his autograph at the end a brief estimate of the work and its author. By the diligence of those who love such treasures no fewer than seventy-

six precious waifs and strays from the dispersed library of Montaigne, or volumes which had been once in his hands, have been recovered. Thus, on the quays of Paris one happy explorer lighted upon the copy of Plantin's edition of Cæsar's *Commentaries*, which Montaigne began to read, as a note records, in February, 1578, and finished in July of the same year. More than six hundred notes in his handwriting appear on the margins; at the end is his appraisal of Cæsar, which furnishes interesting matter of comparison with the later judgment pronounced in the *Essays*. M. Parison, the lucky bibliophile, cannot be censured for imprudence in his expenditure of ninety centimes upon the acquisition of this volume.

M. Bonnefon, in an article in the *Review of the Literary History of France* (15 July, 1895), has described each of these seventy-six waifs and strays, and has endeavoured to ascertain the local habitation of each. Both in that article and in his *Montaigne and his Friends*, he has considered the indications which they afford respecting Montaigne's tastes as a reader and a lover of literature. Little more can here be attempted than to bring within a narrow compass what he has set forth at large. Some of the books which have been recovered may have formed part of the legacy of La Boétie, but no decisive evidence that it once belonged to Montaigne's dead friend has been found

in any one of them. It may be assumed that they were in the main acquired by Montaigne himself, and so considerable a fraction of the whole collection may fairly be regarded as representative.

Latin, we must remember, was Montaigne's mother tongue. His first enthusiasm for literature was awakened by the luxuriant beauty of the poetry of Ovid. Virgil and Terence delighted him not only in his elder but in his youthful years. It is true that at a comparatively early age he ceased to speak Latin, and did not often use it in writing; but if any shock of joy or pain surprised him—as when his father once tottered against him in a swoon—it was a Latin exclamation that instinctively would rise to his lips. We should expect to find that a large proportion of the books which constantly nourished his mind, more often dipped into than continuously studied, were in the language which alone he had spoken as a child. Such is actually the case with the group which now represents the collection on which the possessor's eyes fell as he looked up from his chair at the rows of books upon his walls. Thirty-five of the seventy-six volumes are in the Latin language. Of these the larger number are by modern writers, but Cæsar, Suetonius, Quintus Curtius, Terence, and Virgil appear in the list. Like the copy of Cæsar, that of Quintus Curtius is annotated in Montaigne's handwriting, and has a

final note by way of general estimate or comment, to which is affixed the date, "July 3rd, 1587".

The Greek books are only nine in number. A copy of Homer's Odyssey of the year 1525, once the property of Mirabeau the elder, sold in Paris in 1792, was alleged to have belonged to Montaigne, and to exhibit marginal notes in his handwriting. It has disappeared from view, and the description in the sale-catalogue cannot now be verified. Among the volumes in Greek, setting aside a folio *Bible* printed at Bâle in the year 1545, that of greatest interest is a copy of Froben's edition (1560) of Plutarch's *Lives;* but the name of Montaigne, written upon one of its leaves, does not seem to be in his own handwriting. On the back of the title-page is found a manuscript list of authors, which has a better claim to be regarded as an autograph; perhaps they were authors whom he had read or hoped to read. But, in truth, Montaigne did not become familiar with Plutarch in the original. Unlike his greatest English contemporary, he had much Latin; but, like Shakespeare, he had certainly less Greek. It was through a translation, itself a work of original genius in its mastery of the spirit of the French language, the translation of Jacques Amyot, that Montaigne entered into intimate companionship with his favourite author. With Amyot he was personally acquainted; from his lips he

heard the story, told in one of the essays, of the magnanimous conduct of the Duke of Guise towards a gentleman who had joined in a conspiracy against his life, and whose treachery, having been discovered, was anticipated with an indignant mercy. Montaigne gave Amyot the palm above all French writers of his time for the naïveté and purity of his style, for that literary virtue of constancy which enables an author to accomplish a labour of great length, and especially for having had the discretion to choose so worthy and so suitable a gift for his country as the works of Plutarch. "Let people tell me what they will," writes Montaigne, depreciating his own attainments in a way which commended them, "I understand nothing of Greek. . . . We ignorant fellows were lost, had not this book raised us out of the mire; thanks to him, we dare now speak and write; the ladies, with his aid, can instruct learned professors; it is our breviary." * The essay goes on to direct Amyot's attention to Xenophon, as an author suitable to a translator whose years of greatest vigour were already past. In the spring of 1581, when Montaigne was in Rome, he dined with the French ambassador, and found, among other learned men who were of the company, his old instructor of early days in Bor-

* *Essays*, II, 4.

deaux, the distinguished scholar Muret. Somewhat rashly Montaigne alleged on behalf of his favourite Amyot that, in passages where he may have missed the precise sense of his original, he yet gave a good approximate meaning, which went well with what preceded and followed in the text. His scholarly acquaintances at once brought the rash eulogist to book, and confronted him with two passages where the imperfect scholarship of Amyot had evidently led him far astray. Montaigne could not question their authority; he professed himself entirely of their opinion, and was much too courteous to beg any of the learned critics to peruse his own essay on *Pedantry*.

Of modern authors in other languages than Latin, whose works appear among the remaining volumes of Montaigne's library, by far the larger number, as might be expected, are French. Two are Spanish. One of the volumes is a portion of the history of Portuguese conquests in the East by a writer who is known as a laborious and conscientious investigator, Lopez de Castañheda. Readers of the essay on *Coaches* and that on *Cannibals* are aware that Montaigne was painfully and indignantly interested in the relations of so-called civilised nations to the nations styled, somewhat hastily as he held, savage. The other volume gives in a rare edition the last book of the romance of *Amadis of Gaul*, which may have

found its way to the tower through some idle curiosity of its occupant, desirous perhaps to experiment on his mature taste with extravagances of fancy, which even when he was a boy had no attraction for him. A second Spanish romance of chivalry, the *Carcel de Amor* of Diego de Sant Pedro, appears also in the list, but in an Italian translation. The Italian books, which number thirteen, are in part historical, the chronicles of Villani, the history of his own times by Lionardo Aretino, and others. Certain of the volumes were probably procured by Montaigne either in anticipation of his journey to Italy, or while he was upon his travels. One might have served as a guide-book to the antiquities of Rome; one dealt with the waters of Italy and their medicinal uses. Others represent those numerous Italian treatises on love—somewhat too sublimated to please Montaigne in certain of his moods—which, with treatises on beauty, were a product of the Renaissance, when Platonism was subtilised and even methodised. A copy of Petrarch, of small size, is interesting because it contains a note in the possessor's handwriting which appears in two other volumes, as if the writer had in a peculiar sense adopted it as his own: "*Mentre si puo*"—"according to what a man can". "My God!" exclaims Montaigne in one of the essays, "how good an office does wisdom to those whose desires it

limits to their power! There is no more useful knowledge; 'according to what a man can' was the refrain and favourite word of Socrates, a word of mighty substance." Two of the books are by an illustrious theological revolter of Italy, Bernardino Ochino of Siena, in one of which Montaigne wrote the words "*Liber prohibitus*"; but this prohibited book, as an inscription on the same page informs us, was chosen as a gift for Montaigne's disciple, Pierre Charron, when he was a visitor at the château on July 2, 1586.

In earlier days Montaigne had cared much for Ariosto, but as age grew upon him the fantasies of Ariosto had no longer power to tickle his "old heavy soul". He was indignant with the "barbaresque stupidity" of those who dared to compare Ariosto with Virgil. The class of books written in Italian which had a special attraction for Montaigne was that considerable one formed by the works of the letter-writers. His friends were of opinion, he says, that he could himself "do something" in this kind. He confesses that he would have preferred to throw his meditations into the form of letters rather than that of essays; but, since La Boétie's death, he had no friend with whom he cared to correspond, no friend who could excite and sustain his thoughts. To forge vain names of imaginary correspondents, and thus "traffic with the wind as others do", he could not;

to do this would be to live in dreamland. "I think I have," he says, "a hundred different volumes of such letters; those of Annibale Caro seem to me the best." Such letters, sometimes spoilt by being tricked out too artificially, were, in fact, often miniature essays, dealing with a central theme, yet straying from it with an air of disengagement. They were not of excessive length, and Montaigne, whose eyesight was quickly fatigued by the printed characters of a page, even when dulled by a superimposed sheet of glass prepared for the purpose, enjoyed a book which he could drop or lay aside. Had the letters been preserved which he had formerly scribbled to ladies—for he loves to think of these passions of his youth—they might perchance be found to contain a page or two worth communicating to youthful lovers. Nowadays if he writes a letter it is always in post-haste; the handwriting is infamous, yet he has no patience to delay like a leisurely scribe: "I have accustomed the great folk who know me to bear with my scrapings and cancels, and my paper without fold or margin. Those letters that cost me most pains are worth the least; when I once begin to labour them, 'tis a sign I am not there; I start content with having no design; the first word begets the second." To write such a letter was easy for Montaigne; but to fold it correctly was not to be compassed by his

clumsy fingers. That operation was always assigned to some one else.

Of the seventeen books written in French which survive from the library, incomparably the most important and precious is the copy of the 1588 edition of Montaigne's own *Essays*, now in the public library of Bordeaux, on which he inscribed those frequent corrections and additions embodied by its editors in the posthumous text of 1595. Of this a little more must be told in a later chapter. The other volumes are for the greater part historical, but the poems of Baïf appear in an edition (1573) which includes six sonnets of La Boétie, differing in various readings from the same sonnets as given by Montaigne. Here also is a copy of Sebastian Munster's *Cosmography*, a book which Montaigne regretted that he had not brought with him to Germany and Italy. He seems on his return to have consulted it in the light of his travels, for many passages which have reference to Italian cities visited in the course of his wanderings are underlined by his pen. One other of these volumes in French deserves special mention—Montaigne's copy of the *Annals and Chronicles of France* (1562), by Master Nicolle Gilles, not quite perfect, but enriched with over one hundred and seventy of the Essayist's annotations and underlinings.

Another principle of classification beside that of the several languages in which they were written is applied by M. Bonnefon to the extant relics of Montaigne's library—a classification according to subjects. Including the *Bible*, and two pieces of heterodox theology, the books which can be classed under divinity are only five. Law and medicine may each claim two volumes. The ex-magistrate had not perhaps retained his law library, if he ever possessed one worthy of consideration; that of La Boétie did not form part of his legacy to Montaigne. As to physic, Montaigne, though he would consult a doctor in his need, was, like his father, profoundly sceptical. He supposed—and the thought was a bitter one—that La Boétie might have recovered, if only the physician had not been by his bedside. Poetry is far less inadequately represented. *The Greek Anthology*, Terence, Virgil, Ausonius, Petrarch, Bèze, Baïf, with perhaps the Homer which for the present has vanished from men's eyes, are enough to prove (if proof were needed, when every page of the *Essays* displays its poetical citations) that Montaigne did not disregard this province of a well-equipped library. Homer, "the first and last of poets", he placed in his trinity of the most excellent men that the world has seen. The other two, Alexander and Epaminondas, are assigned this pre-eminence on

grounds unconnected with literature. But Montaigne did not consider himself a competent judge of the art of Homer; he grasped at the glorious substance of the Homeric poetry, but was unable to taste and dwell upon its style with that fine sense which enjoyed, as the tongue enjoys some exquisite fruit, the savour and flavour of Virgil's verse. The *Georgics* seemed to him the most accomplished work in the whole range of poetry. Of the *Æneid* he considered the Fifth Book the most admirable. Lucan he loved, not so much for his style as for a certain personal worth which he recognised through the poetry, and for the truth of his judgments and opinions. Horace and Catullus he placed in the first rank of lyrical writers. Among dramatists he assigned the highest position to Terence, "*le bon Terence*", whose delicate mastery of the graces of language was felt by Montaigne as a merit hardly inferior to the fidelity and animation with which he represents the various movements of the soul and depicts the manners of society. With fine literary discrimination Montaigne observed that the contemporary writers of comedy piled together incidents, intertangling three or four arguments from Terence or Plautus to make one of their own, or heaping five or six tales of Boccaccio on the top one of another, because they could not rely upon the interest of their art as such;

whereas with Terence " the perfection and beauty of his way of speaking make us lose our appetite for his plot; his grace and elegance hold us throughout." Montaigne extended this remark by adding that the ancient poets, unlike the moderns, avoided affectations, and not only those fantastic Spanish and Petrarchan exaltations of modern verse, but even the milder and less aggressive " points" which constitute the chief ornaments of later poetry.

Without any system of literary rules or doctrine, which he would leave to pedants, Montaigne had formed his literary taste upon classical models, and his judgments are given with almost unerring propriety, like that of a genuine connoisseur of wines when he pronounces on the vintages of famous years. Matthew Arnold, in a well-known preface, insisted on the contrast between classical and modern poetry precisely in the spirit in which Montaigne writes. A good sentence or a thing well said, Montaigne admits, is always in season. But no coruscating beauties in a work of art can compensate for a central deficiency in the design. So Menander, when they reproached him, as the day drew near by which one of his comedies was promised, that he had not yet put his hand to the work, replied, " It is composed and ready, I have only to add the verses." The growth of Montaigne's literary feeling may

be indicated by three successive names, expressive of three successive stages—Ovid, Lucan, Virgil; or, as he distinguishes the master qualities of these poets, first he yielded himself to the charm of "a gay and ingenious fluidity", next, to the attractions of a subtlety which is elevating and penetrating; finally, to the sense of "a mature and constant force" in perfect balance with grace. Yet no one recognised more clearly than Montaigne that there is something irreducible to rule and method, something incalculable in poetry, something which seems to be the unforeseen gift of a fortunate moment, and that "a grain of folly" in a poet may be a grain of divinest wisdom: "The true, supreme, and divine poesy is above all rules and reason." And the critic himself is carried away by the enthusiasm of his delight: "Whoever discerns the beauty of it with an assured and steady sight sees in truth nothing of it, any more than he who can gaze upon the splendour of a flash of lightning; such poetry does not exercise our judgment; it ravishes and ravages it. . . . From my earliest childhood poetry has had the power to transpierce and transport me." * And again: "As Cleanthes has described the voice constrained within the narrow channel of a trumpet, and so coming forth with

* *Essays*, I, 36.

more piercing power, so it seems to me that a sentence, compressed within the harmonious limits of poesy, darts forth with much more sudden force, and strikes me with a livelier impact." *

A poet whose invention does not enable him to attain excellence of matter, or such incalculable beauties as are proper to genius alone, must needs garnish his poverty with the tags and ribbons of ingenuity. Montaigne, after his manner, expresses his thought by vivid imagery, which his Elizabethan translator, Florio, has transformed into his old English with so much spirit that his words are perhaps better than a more exact translation:

"Even as in our dances those base conditioned men that keep dancing-schools, because they are unfit to represent the port and decencie of our nobilitie, endeavour to get commendation by dangerous lofty trickes, and other strange tumbler-like friskes and motions. And some Ladies make a better show of their countenances in those dances wherein are divers changes, cuttings, turnings, and agitations of body than in some dances of state and gravity, where they need but simply to tread a natural measure, represent an unaffected carriage, and their ordinary grace. And as I have also seen some excellent Lourdans or Clownes, attired in their ordinary worky-day clothes, and with a common homely countenance, afford us all the pleasure that may be had from their art: Prentises and learners that are not of so high a forme, to besmeare their

* *Essays*, I, 25.

faces, to disguise themselves, and in motions to counterfeit strange viages, and antickes, to enduce us to laughter." *

Montaigne proceeds to contrast Virgil's *Æncid* with Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso;* the former "soaring aloft with full-spread wings, and with so high and strong a pitch, ever following his *point*"; the latter faintly hovering and fluttering, skipping from bough to bough, "always distrusting his own wings, except it be for some short flight, and for fear his strength and breath should fail him, to sit down at every field's end." Such criticism of poetry is that of one who was himself a poet, though not in verse.

Montaigne was not so illiberal as to reserve all his admiration for the poets of Greece and Rome. He had a peculiar pleasure in the accomplished Latin versifiers of his own century; Dorat, Buchanan, Bèze, L'Hôpital, Mondoré, Turnèbe are named with special honour. He hailed the leaders of the Pleiad as the new lights of French poetry. He supposed that Ronsard and Du Bellay could never be surpassed, and in their best work it seemed to him that they approached even classical perfection. But for the crowd of rhymers, who had caught the trick of phrasing and the turns of harmony from these masters, he had no toleration. What he could least endure in

* *Essays*, II, 10.

poetry was mediocrity. A man may play the fool elsewhere, he thought, but not in poetry. Yet there is a kind of poetry with far humbler pretensions than that of the aspirants who never attain mastery, which Montaigne highly esteemed. It was asserted by Ampère that Montaigne was the earliest writer to employ the expression "*poésie populaire*"; perhaps he was the first to indicate the folk-song as a species in itself. "Popular and purely natural poetry," he says, "has certain naïveties, certain graces by which it may come into comparison with the greatest beauty of poetry perfected by art; as we see in the villanelles of Gascony, and in the songs brought to us from nations that have no acquaintance with writing. The poetry that occupies the mean between these two is despised, of no honour and of no value." * With the folk-song of Gascony he would probably have classed his charming "Stay, adder, stay" of the savages.

In the essay, *Upon some Verses of Virgil*, which was first published in 1588, a passage from Lucretius, describing the amorous delight of Mars is quoted, and Montaigne holds upon his literary palate verb and adjective and participle, as if to draw out the full flavour of the words. "This noble *circumfusa*", this *pascit, pendet, percurrit*—

* *Essays*, I, 54.

he rolls each expression as a sweet morsel under his tongue. In comparison with this almost material realisation of things in words he despises the little points, and verbal ingenuities, and allusive remoteness from reality, which have made their appearance in later literature. He loves this sinewy, solid, almost carnal, style, which does not so much gratify as replenish the mind: "When I see these brave forms of expression, so living, so profound, I do not say 'This is well said', but 'This is well thought'." Such painting is achieved not by dexterity of touch, but by having the eye possessed by the object; then the magazine of words is forced to render up the absolute expression—"the sense lights up and produces the words, not now words of air, but of flesh and bone." There is then no need to seek out curiosities of diction, to follow the wretched affectation of some new style. The old familiar words submit themselves to more vivid and intimate meanings. They may, like shrubs or flowers, be transplanted, and thereby grow stronger; a word of the chase or a military term may be precisely the needful word to interpret some act of the mind, some passion of the soul. Our vocabulary is copious enough, but it might be more pliable and sinewy. How often in presence of a powerful conception it seems to succumb, and when it flags and languishes we turn for help to Latin or, it

may be, to Greek. To reanimate language by intense observation, by vital penetrating perception, by feelings exact, vivid, and profound—such is the true process of an original style. It is, indeed, as if Montaigne were giving us the secret of his own method, so marvellous when at its best in producing a style pregnant with imaginative life, a thing of abounding vigour, yet so easy, so insinuating! Is the glove which his hand wears of cheverel or of steel?

Dear as poetry was to Montaigne, he loved the best writers of prose hardly, if at all, less. "The best ancient prose," he says, "shines throughout with a poetic vigour and boldness, and not without some air of its fury." Plato, for example, is wholly poetic; the old theology, as the learned assert, is all poetry; the first poetic philosophy is "the original language of the gods". Some of the volumes of prose which he had beside him were read merely for rest and recreation; they were simply pleasant, "*simplement plaisant*", and among the moderns this class was best represented by *The Decameron* of Boccaccio. As belonging to this group he names also the writings of his great predecessor in the literature of the French Renaissance—Rabelais. It is strange that the penetrating vision of Montaigne should not have discovered the exultant earnestness of Rabelais's shout on behalf of emancipation, and his

serious enthusiasm for science. But the full significance of recent and contemporary writers is often veiled for a time, and Rabelais had himself thrown the jester's motley over his warrior's garb. Perhaps the minstrel Taillefer, as he charged at the battle of Senlac with his song and his jongleur's trick, was regarded by the horsemen who followed him as no more than "*simplement plaisant*". Montaigne, indeed, came at a time which seemed to belie the highest hopes of Rabelais. While Calvinist and Catholic were at each other's throats, the prophecy of Rabelais sounded like a voice carried away by the storm, and its words were not intelligible. Only the enormous buffoon could be seen gesticulating and tumbling in the mire.

Whether he read books simply pleasant or those which, he hoped, might lead him to a knowledge of himself and instruct him how to live, Montaigne was accustomed to form no large designs, but rather to live in the moment and to make much of it. Ideas came to him through books, not by a continuous process of study, but by sudden rays and instantaneous flashes. If he met difficulties in his reading, he "did not bite his nails". After a charge or two against the obstacle, he left it. His intellect was impatient and swiftly prehensile. He took things at the first bound or not at all. And so in his own body of

thought he did not construct a unity or even a harmony; such unity as there is grows out of his temperament and character; it is not formal but vital. In minor matters if he contradicts himself —well, he contradicts himself, and why not? When his dealings were with books and authors, he desired above all to preserve his spirit of gaiety; he was always at his best "under a clear sky". Continuance and contention, even with a favourite author, dazzled, dulled, and wearied his judgment. The effect was like that of scarlet on the eye, when gazed at obstinately and long. "If one book tires me," he writes, "I take another, and yield myself to it only in those hours when the tedium of doing nothing descends upon me. I do not much addict myself to new ones, because the old seem fuller and stronger; nor to Greek books, because my judgment cannot do its work aright, where my intelligence is imperfect like that of a child or of one learning his trade."

The historians and the moralists, even more than the poets, were the special "game" hunted by Montaigne. The historians were regarded by him not as chroniclers, telling a tale of little meaning, but as moralists teaching by example, and, in a wider sense, as presenters of that curious creature, man, while they set forth his various customs, manners, laws, complexions, humours; man, perpetually changing from age to age, every-

where diverse from clime to clime, yet ever and everywhere the same marvellously vain, shifting, undulant being. Thirty-one out of the total of seventy-six books, once Montaigne's, which have been recovered, are historical; not far from half of the entire number. On the memorials of individuals and of the species found in such records as these, it was the essay or trial of his judgment that Montaigne especially desired to make. He did not care merely to load his memory with facts; his memory was a most convenient sieve, which let the idle rubbish of insignificant, unilluminated facts escape. He would not be a pedant, who makes his jewel of an opaque pebble. A fact was of value to him as the means of attaining a truth. Whatever threw light upon any feature, any aspect of human nature, he appropriated for his own uses. Such "game" he bagged in that serviceable memory of his safely enough; and often an anecdote seemingly trivial, but significant when turned around and seen on the right side, told him more than any pompous setting-forth of public events; for these, as he would say, are often the result not of human character or human resolve but of that incalculable "fortune" which determines the issues of things. Caring for anecdotes, he turned with peculiar interest to the biographical side of history; he could not learn enough about men and

the lives of men in their minutest details: "Those who write *Lives*, by reason that they concern themselves more with counsels than events, more with what proceeds from within than what happens without, are the more proper for my reading, and this is the reason why Plutarch"—*our* Plutarch, as Montaigne elsewhere familiarly calls him—"above all others is the man for me." He desired to study action in relation to character, as the most fruitful form of study. But even in the case of men of thought rather than of action he divined that there might be some occult relation between abstract dogma and personal characteristics or the play of a peculiar environment. He did not find one Diogenes Laertius sufficient with his *Lives of the Philosophers;* he wished for a dozen; for he was "equally curious to be acquainted with the lives and fortunes of these great instructors of the world and with the diversity of their dogmas and conceits." Diversity everywhere; diversity lying within the bounds, so narrow yet so indeterminable, of humanity; and the chief word in Montaigne's logic was the word *Distinguo*.

The historians seemed to him to fall into three groups. The division that he had made in poetry—"popular" poetry or folk-song on the one hand, the divine masters of poetic art on the other, and between them a worthless tribe of imitators and

aspirants—was, in a slightly altered form, applicable here. There were first the "simple" historians, who are diligent to gather concrete facts and to record them with entire good faith; they add nothing of their own, but they provide genuine matter on which the judgment can make its essay. Perhaps Montaigne did not quite do justice to the artistic gift of honest Froissart—"*le bon Froissart*"—when he named him as representative of the class. Such writers give us the naked and inform matter of history, from which, according to his understanding, every one may make his profit. The highest order of historians select what is essential fact, they establish true connections, they draw just inferences, they pronounce wise judgments; and thus they regulate our belief. The middle sort—and most historians fall within this class—are those who spoil everything they touch; they will chew our meat for us; they wrest facts aside according to their own bias; select what is impertinent, omit what is significant, because they have not wit to perceive its import; judge without judgment; and leave us nothing to do, for we have got nothing rendered to us purely and in good faith. Such writers are for the most part mere men of letters, whose chief qualification for dealing with real affairs is that they can string sentences together. In the opinion of Montaigne the only good histories are those

written by persons who themselves were men of action and of authority, and whose judgment had been made ripe by experience in the kind of affairs of which they write.

Through such authors he not only made a real acquaintance with the subjects handled in the masterful way of the masters; he also entered into that intimacy with superior minds which is the happiest part of study. "I have a singular curiosity to know the soul and the spontaneous judgments of my authors." The form thus became almost more important than the matter, or rather the form became itself a more important kind of matter—the true matter for his examination. How things shape themselves in the minds of the masters; how, like an etcher of genius, they select the essential, the dominant lines; how they take things up, as we say, by the right handle; how they distinguish and how they combine; upon what hints they conjecture or infer; upon what grounds they draw conclusions; what kindles their enthusiasm; how they hold the balance between intellect and emotions; what temper controls their words and models their sentences—to observe and ponder such matters as these is to receive the best lessons and the substantial delights of literature. And it was in this way that Montaigne hoped that his own writings might be regarded by a thoughtful reader. "Let him attend not to

my body of matter but to the fashion in which I mould it." As a reader, he often cared only to rest his busy brain; he often cared only to give his languid brain a fillip; but sometimes he read pen in hand, underlining what seemed to him remarkable; commenting and questioning upon the margin; alive in all his mind. Finally he would sum up, briefly, and as one who speaks with authority, all his impressions in one decisive estimate of his author. He has given us examples of such verdicts on three of the historians whom he had read with special attention—Guicciardini, Philippe de Comines, and, descending from the past to his own early days, Martin du Bellay who in his *Memoirs* had the assistance of his brother, Guillaume de Langey. The cynicism of Guicciardini, who never attributes an action to any but a base or a self-interested motive, is regarded by Montaigne as a somewhat shallow error of judgment. The moral qualities of Comines are applauded with genuine warmth, but Montaigne finds in his work a certain insufficiency of intellect. The *Memoirs* of Du Bellay he would apparently place high in his second class rather than in the first and most excellent rank of histories. The writers lack the disinterested freedom of spirit which he finds in both Joinville and Comines; their work is more an apology for King Francis than genuine history.

The Cæsar, so fortunately recovered by M. Parison, adds another to these estimates written by Montaigne upon the fly-leaves of his books, when, as he tells us, he had decided not to read the book again and desired to preserve his immediate impression from the blurring effect of time upon a memory on which recent things were constantly scribbled and older things faded or were entirely effaced. Nearly five months of the year 1578 were devoted to the study of the *Commentaries*. At the close Montaigne felt that during all those days he had been in contact with "one of the greatest miracles of Nature"—for, indeed, from the stuff she mingled in Cæsar, Nature might have made two extraordinary men—an incomparable military chief and also an historian of absolute precision and sincerity, whose words had the exactness and the authority which words of command possess.* After the first enthusiasm of his reading had declined, Montaigne could make reservations; if he turned over a page it was still with a sense of reverence almost greater than can be due to human works; but Cæsar was ambitious; he even speaks of the "ordure" of Cæsar's "pestilent ambition"—that

* This MS. note in Montaigne's copy of Cæsar was printed by Dr. Payen, *Documents inédits*, No. 3 (1855), pp. 31, 32, and is given by M. Bonnefon, *Montaigne et ses Amis*, I, pp. 265, 266.

of a "public robber", who has left a memory "abominable to all worthy men". And yet the spell of Cæsar was one from which his critic could not escape. The least incident, the lightest word of Cæsar interested Montaigne—how he wore rich garments in battle, how he honoured a favourite horse, how he scratched his poll with one finger, how he turned away his eyes from the sight of Pompey's head, his choice of a death, "the least premeditated and the speediest", his saying, on which an essay is founded, that it is a common vice of nature to derive most assurance and most terror from things unseen, concealed, and unknown. He thought of Cæsar's justice, his clemency, his promptitude, his vigilance, his patience in labour, his regard for friends, the grandeur of his courage, his great amorousness which never trammelled his great passion for power—and when all was felt and pondered, Montaigne concluded that ambition had spoilt the most rich and beautiful nature that ever was.

In his earlier essays Montaigne occasionally makes a quotation from Tacitus, but he does not seem to have devoted serious attention to that great writer until the period of leisure which followed those years during which he held the mayoralty of Bordeaux. Then, yielding to the urgency of a friend, he read in Tacitus constantly

from day to day, and in Tacitus alone. It was twenty years, he says, since he had kept to any one book for an hour together. Montaigne valued whatever throws light on personal characters and manners in history, and though he found not a little of this in Tacitus, he wished for more than he had received. He thought that Tacitus is sometimes less penetrating in his judgments of character than a historian ought to be. He commends him for his courage in giving reports of things in themselves improbable or hardly credible. We ought not to set limits to the power of Nature; we ought to accept the testimony of witnesses. A historian should record even popular rumours and opinions as a highly important part of history; it is for his reader to consider and pronounce upon their truth. He censures Tacitus —and this is characteristic of the author of the *Essays*—because, having to refer to himself as an office-holder of dignity, he apologises for this reference as if it might be regarded as ostentation. Such an apology was a little unworthy of such a spirit as that of Tacitus: "Not to speak roundly of one's self convicts a writer of some want of courage; a man of inflexible and lofty judgment, who judges soundly and surely, makes use of instances drawn from himself on all occasions as if from some matter foreign to him, and bears testimony frankly concerning himself as if

it concerned a third party." * Montaigne, as a critic of literature, is not ill represented by the words in which he sums up the peculiar qualities of the work of Tacitus: "It is rather a judgment than a narration of history; † there are in it more precepts than stories; it is not a book to read, but one to study and learn; it is so full of moral sentences that some of these are right, some wrong; it is a nursery of ethic and politic discourses for the use and ornament of those who have any place in the management of the world. He always urges his plea with strong and solid reasons, in a style full of points and subtleties, according to the fashion affected by his age; they so loved a swelling dignity that where they failed to find points and subtleties in things, they sought for these in words. He does not fall much short of Seneca's way of writing; he seems to me the more brawny (*charnu*); Seneca, the more keen. The service he renders is most suitable to a crazed, troubled state such as ours at present is; you would often say that he paints us and pinches us to the quick." ‡

Plutarch—the French Plutarch of Amyot—had a double attraction for Montaigne; he was

* *Essays*, III, 8.

† The word *narration* (1588) became *deduction* in the later edition of the *Essays* (1595).

‡ *Essays*, III, 8.

both historian and moralist. As a historian he seemed to Montaigne to be pre-eminent as a judge of human actions. As a moralist he was not a maker of systems, but a penetrating observer of the facts of human nature, who wrote discursively and who could be read in a spirit of serious gaiety. "I have not had commerce with any solid book," Montaigne writes to the Countess de Gurson, "except Plutarch and Seneca, from whom, like the Danaides, I draw my water, incessantly filling and as fast emptying." The *Morals* of Plutarch were as frequently in the hands of Montaigne as the *Lives*, and he found it highly satisfactory that if his favourite author was in a certain sense a philosopher, he was assuredly no metaphysician. The metaphysical systems of the old world floated past Plutarch like wrecks after a tempest. He had his own tendencies, his own grasps of guess, but he never fashioned these into a foursquare body of doctrine. "He is perhaps the sole moralist of antiquity," writes M. Octave Gréard, "who has not discussed the problem of the sovereign good." * He was, like Montaigne himself, an interested student of the world and of human life; he loved, like Montaigne, the concrete; he reasons through examples. Had Montaigne needed a model for

* *De la Morale de Plutarque*, p. 53.

his *Essays*, some of the discourses of Plutarch might have stood him in good stead. Plutarch's writings—to quote M. Gréard again—seem often the rendezvous of all the doctrines, and some of Montaigne's own essays could hardly be more accurately described.

Through his imagination, and only through it, Montaigne was—or, to be more exact, was at times—a Stoic. Seneca served him if not as a director of his conscience, at least as a guide to his imaginative ideals of morality. His name, as in the opening of the essay on the *Institution of Children* is often coupled with that of Plutarch. Both the Greek and the Roman moralists pleased him because they could be read in short, disconnected pieces—"it is no great matter to take them in hand, and I quit them when I list." Montaigne, in his musings, was conducted by Seneca up the rugged heights which led to a somewhat barren pinnacle of virtue. But when he awoke from his musings he found himself upon the plain, the plain it may be of an elevated table-land, and Plutarch was his companion in his search after a temperate, amiable, unrepelling human virtue, which should serve him in his daily needs. In an essay of the Third Book—that *Of Physiognomy*—he contrasts Seneca's laboured efforts to fortify himself against death, his sweating and panting in the toil of it, with Plutarch's more virile way,

that of a soul whose motions are regular and assured. Yet he remembers that, after all, Seneca did not fail in the last trial: "The one—Seneca—more sharp," he says, "pricks us, and sends us off with a start; he touches the spirit more. The other—Plutarch—more solid, fashions, establishes, and supports us constantly. That ravishes our judgment; this wins it"; or, as he elsewhere has it, Seneca impels and Plutarch guides us. An entire essay (Book II, 32) is devoted to a grateful defence of his two chief teachers against what Montaigne regarded as unjust criticism. Montaigne cannot credit the accusation that the life of Seneca gave the lie to his writings, that he was effeminate, ambitious, avaricious, a false pretender to philosophy. And he maintains against his contemporary, Jean Bodin, the eminent author of *The Republic*, that Plutarch, the most judicious author in the world, exhibited no want of judgment in setting down things in his story which might to Bodin appear incredible or absolutely fabulous. Looking around him at the surprising events and incidents of his own time, looking into his own heart and perceiving there the seeds of all possible magnanimities, all possible meannesses, Montaigne believed that we should be slow to affirm of anything that it is incredible. But Plutarch's excellent judgment appears less strikingly in his

narrative than in his parallels of the Greeks and Romans—precisely where Bodin failed to recognise it, where Bodin charged Plutarch with unfair partiality for the Greeks.

Montaigne loved an author who gave him a quick and full return for the time and pains bestowed by the reader. He complains that Cicero fatigued him with his long preparatory or initiatory passages:

"What there is in him of life and marrow is smothered by his long preambles. When I have spent an hour in reading him, which is much for me, and try to recall what I have thence extracted of juice and substance, for the most part I find nothing but wind. . . . For me, who desire only to become more wise, not more learned or eloquent, these logical and Aristotelian dispositions of parts are unsuitable; I would have one begin with the last and chief point. I know well enough what death and pleasure are; let not a man busy himself to anatomise these. I look for good and solid reasons, at the outset, which may instruct me how to sustain their assaults; for which purpose neither grammatical subtleties, nor the ingenious contexture of words and argumentations are of any avail. . . . I would not have an author make it his business to render me attentive, or that he should shout at me fifty times *Oyez!* as they do. The Romans in their religious exercises were wont to say *Hoc age;* we, in ours, say *Sursum corda;* these are so many lost words for me; I come already fully prepared from my chamber. I need no allurement, no sauce; I eat the meat uncooked; and instead of whetting my appetite with these preparatives and flourishes, they tire and pall it."*

* *Essays,* II, 10.

These are the confessions of a hearty lover of good books, read not for scholarship but for the uses of life. The acknowledgments made in favour of Cicero are made, as it were, against the grain. And here, as elsewhere, Montaigne takes his own way, for Cicero was exalted, by virtue of that eloquence which Montaigne recognises and applauds, to a pre-eminent place in the esteem of classical students in Renaissance days. The man himself (and now Montaigne accepts what he calls the common opinion) seemed wanting in dignity and strength of soul; a mendicant spirit that could not live without the alms of popular applause. "Shame upon that eloquence," he cries, "which fills us with desire of itself and not of actual things! Unless, indeed, one should argue that Cicero's eloquence is of such supreme perfection that it constitutes a substantial body in itself."

To handle things—that was what brought satisfaction to Montaigne, and the book which brought him things in their real substance was the book he prized, not that which merely arranged a decoration of words. He viewed the art of rhetoric with suspicion; it was often like rougeing and plastering a wrinkled and faded face. The truly "consular spirits" of ancient Rome were not masters of tongue-fence. The jargon of the fine arts, the jargon of literary criticism seemed to him of no more real meaning

than the babble of his chambermaid. He had the advantage, on one occasion, of holding discourse with a master of eloquence who was also an eminent master of science—an Italian, formerly house-steward of Cardinal Caraffa. Montaigne loved to converse with a learned man in his special province. With profound gravity and a magisterial countenance the great artist poured forth an eloquent discourse on the gullet-science, as if he were handling some high point of theology. Montaigne with a reserved smile noted the orator's divisions and subdivisions, and records them in the essay on *The Vanity of Words.* The exordium in particular was adorned with rich and magnificent phrases, such as we make use of when treating of the government of an empire. But the great rhetorician's interlocutor would have valued more a hare or a haddock creditably cooked.

Looking back in his elder days upon the "three commerces" or societies which had made up so large a portion of his life—that with men in friendship and the clasp of minds, that with women in the delights of beauty and of art, and that calmer commerce with the faithful companions on the shelves of his library—Montaigne cannot assign the highest place to the last except for its virtues of facility and constancy. Many persons require some foreign matter to give their

thinking power exercise and animation; for his own part he obtained these when his mind made a return upon itself and recollected itself in solitary meditatings. Books brought him rest or distraction more often than exercise; they might, indeed, debauch the mind by diverting it from its more vigorous, unassisted toil. And yet when he read, he often found his intellect rising to grapple with things, his judgment—that which he most valued in himself—engaging itself in a manly play. And so he looks gratefully from his chair at "the learned shelf" and finds that he had rightly named its contents "*meas delicias.*" This commerce with books had been with him, during his whole course of youth and manhood, always an assistance to his life: "It consoles me in old age and solitude; it eases me from the weight of weary indolence, and delivers me at all hours from vexatious company; it blunts the edge of pain if this be not extreme and masterful. To divert myself from any importunate fancy, I have only to turn to my books; they readily win me to themselves, and banish the other from my mind, nor do they mutiny because they perceive that I seek them only for want of other commodities more real, lively, and natural; they ever entertain me with the same countenance." *

* *Essays*, III, 3.

Troubled with a painful malady during these latter years, Montaigne felt that he resembled King James of Naples and Sicily, who was borne about in a poor gray robe on a pitiful litter, but attended with royal pomp, gallant nobles and gentlemen, led horses, and splendid circumstance. The volumes around his walls were Montaigne's brave attendants. If he was not actually enjoying his possessions, he knew, like a miser, that his wealth was there to gloat over when he pleased. "This is the best munition," he says, "that I have found in our human wayfaring, and I pity much those men of understanding who are unprovided of it. I the rather accept any other sort of amusement how light soever, because this can never fail me."

The best viaticum of the journey through this our life! Such a happiness in communing with the highest intellects for the sake of exercise and rest, of wisdom and comfort and recreation, had in it something of the nature of virtue. This was not the dilettante's regard for books, though in Montaigne there was something of the dilettante; it was essentially a virile passion of the mind.

CHAPTER VII

LIFE IN THE CHÂTEAU

The life of Montaigne during those years when the essays of the first two books were gradually forming themselves was by no means that of a recluse. A new link of connection with the great world was created in the early days of his retirement, when, on October 18, 1571, he received from Blois a letter in which Charles IX. informed him that "for his virtues and merits" he had been chosen and elected as one of the Knights of the Order of St. Michael, and directed him to repair to the Marquis de Trans in order that he might receive from his hands the collar of the order. He had in his earlier manhood desired much to obtain this honour. It was then a mark of rare distinction. When fortune brought it to him, he says with a touch of irony, she was kinder than he had hoped; instead of lifting him up out of his place, she brought the coveted honour down as low as his own shoulders, and even lower. The collar had in truth been cheapened by the efforts of the Guises to secure friends and followers at little cost to themselves, and by the careless facility of Charles in his distribution of rewards. M. Courbet has conjectured that Gas-

ton de Foix, the Marquis de Trans, having fallen under the serious displeasure of the Chancellor L'Hôpital, on the occasion of the visit of Charles IX. to Bordeaux six years previously, may have engaged the services of Montaigne with the Chancellor on his own behalf, and may now have cleared off the old score by procuring a cheap distinction for the man who had done him a good turn. Some scornful words of Brantôme, who had a touch or aristocratic disdain for the legal profession, indicate that the Marquis had a hand in obtaining the collar for Montaigne. However this may have been, Montaigne reserved for himself, a little inconsistently, the double satisfaction of pride in the distinction and pride in being superior to that pride. He displayed the collar in effigy upon the walls of his chapel and his private cabinet in the tower. He makes little of the honour — degraded during recent years — in two of the essays.* And as the order had been originally designed to reward not merely valiant soldiers but great military leaders, he finds, with some subtlety, a warrant of his own inclusion in it. Military valour and prudence are, after all, only one ray issuing from that perfect and philosophical valiance, that force and assurance of the soul, which enable it to despise all kinds of ad-

* Book II, 7; and Book II, 12.

verse accidents and to remain equable, uniform, and constant. Montaigne was aware that he was far from being the tranquil possessor of such philosophical valiance, yet it was an ideal which he held up before himself, and which in some inadequate degree had even incorporated itself with his spirit.

In 1574 Charles IX. was succeeded on the throne by his brother, Henri III. It is certain that Montaigne was one of the many gentlemen in ordinary of the King's chamber, but the date of his appointment has not been ascertained. On the title-page of the first edition of the *Essays* (1580) the author describes himself as "*Chevalier de l'ordre du Roy et Gentil-homme ordinaire de sa Chambre.*" Such gentlemen in ordinary were very numerous; the Venetian ambassadors to the Court in 1577 were impressed by the great array of the King's attendants. The duties of those in residence were not laborious; they introduced persons to the royal presence, and held themselves in readiness to receive and execute his orders. But so great was the number of these functionaries that residence was probably not required of all. The title served as a distinction, and permitted its owner, if he desired it, to approach the person of the monarch.* A like ap-

* A. Grün, *La Vie publique de Montaigne*, p. 180.

pointment—and here Montaigne's own entry in the *Ephemerides* of Beuther enables us to fix the date, November 29, 1577—was conferred upon him by King Henri of Navarre. Why this favour, unsought by its recipient and unknown to him until the letters patent were placed in his hands, was conferred can only be conjectured. Montaigne's relations with Henri of Navarre at a later date were of a close and confidential character. It may be that in 1577, as has been suggested, he had already rendered some service to the King of Navarre and also to his fellow citizens in difficulties which had arisen when Henri desired to enter the city and the civic authorities were obliged to intimate to him their unwillingness to receive him.* When at Blois in the autumn of 1588, a witness of the meeting of the States General, Montaigne entered into conversation with the historian De Thou. In his *Memoirs* De Thou reports words of Montaigne to the effect that he had formerly acted as an intermediary between the King of Navarre and the Duke of Guise when these princes were at the Court; that the Duke had made every effort to gain the friendship of the King; that he had found this impossible, and as a last resource to defend the honour of his house, had resorted to war; and that each

* E. Courbet, *Essays*, Vol. V, pp. 104, 105.

of the two could live in security only through the death of the other. As to religion, Montaigne went on, which they both paraded as a motive, it was a mere pretext to confirm their respective followers; the fear of being deserted by the Protestants prevented the King of Navarre from declaring himself a Catholic, and the Duke would have been ready to accept the Confession of Augsburg, had it not been prejudicial to his interests. If the negotiation referred to by Montaigne really took place at the Court of the French King, it must be assigned to some date between the marriage of Henri of Navarre in August, 1572, and his escape from the Court in February, 1576. But it seems on various grounds probable that in his mention of the presence of the King of Navarre at the Court, De Thou cannot have accurately reported Montaigne's conversation. His diplomatic services between the great rivals may more probably belong to a later date—perhaps to a date between his return from Italy and 1588, the year of the publication of the *Essays*, in their extended form, and that of the assassination of the Duke of Guise. It is not desirable to construct from slender hints an imaginary biography of Montaigne, but we may be assured that in such a negotiation as this—whatever its date may be—he would have impressed the parties concerned favourably by his manifest fidelity, his openness, his discre-

tion, his desire for a peaceful solution of the questions at issue, his real disinterestedness. These merits as a diplomatic agent he claims for himself in the *Essays*, and such independent testimony as we possess confirms his not overweening assertion.

It would be a mistake to treat as of high importance what has been called the "public life" of Montaigne during the decade which preceded his travels in Italy. Yet, as we have seen, he acted in 1574 as the intermediary between the Duke de Montpensier and the Parliament of Bordeaux and he acquitted himself well. Such an incident as this was, however, only the interruption of a life essentially private, spent in the château with his wife in the old French fashion, among the labourers in the fields who capped to him as he went by on horseback with his hounds, and whose homely virtues he regarded with so much respect—for he knew the pleasures of the chase, though he shrank remorsefully from its triumphs—above all in his library meditating much, reading a little, and either writing now and again a page or dictating to that servant-man who once made off with the manuscript as if it were a treasure, and who got so little—Montaigne reflected to his comfort—through such a refined taste in peculation.

After the death of his first child in 1570 he was

not for long childless. On September 9, 1571, his daughter Léonor was born. Four other children followed during the twelve succeeding years; but Mademoiselle de Montaigne, with all her household virtues, was not "generous" enough to give her husband a son; and of his six girls only Léonor lived to be more than an infant. Montaigne was one of those fathers who, while not lacking in paternal tenderness, have no exultant pleasure in the small new-born human animal; it was the growing intellect of a child which interested him. He did not choose that his babies should be put to nurse in the château; their foster-mothers were peasants of the neighbourhood; and, when he recalls, with a real or affected vagueness, that he had lost "two or three" of these nurselings, he confesses that his regret, though it might have been real, was not acute; yet there is hardly any accident, he adds, which more touches men to the quick than the death of a child. Montaigne did not love sorrow, and had no pride in maintaining it in its excess; he was always happy to be happy, in which, as well as in the pride of sorrow, there is a good deal of human nature. His regard for children was not slight, as the essay on *Education* shows. His heart was tender; he delighted to set free any captive wild creature of the woods or fields; he speaks of what was little understood in the sixteenth

century, the duty of humanity not only to all our living fellow creatures which have life and sense, but even to trees and plants. "We owe justice to men," he writes, "and graciousness and benignity to other creatures that are capable of receiving these; there is a certain commerce and a mutual obligation between them and us. Nor do I fear to confess the tenderness of my nature, as so childish that I cannot well refuse to my dog the merrymaking which he unseasonably offers or asks of me." And in a well-known passage: "When I play with my cat, who knows whether I do not make her more sport than she makes me? we mutually divert each other with our monkey-tricks; if I have my hour to begin or refuse, she also has hers." Such a man could not but have responded to the pretty ways and wiles of a child. Yet he thought that there is a wiser and better way of loving our children than for our own sport, "like monkeys". The ideal training, he thought, is that which results in making a father and his children friends and, as far as may be, comrades. Having the memory abiding with him of his own father's gentleness, he believed that harshness can serve no good purpose in domestic relations. He had seen fathers—and such instances in those wild times were not few—who had refused their sons every need and every indulgence, and driven them to a life of robbery

and open violence. For his own part he held that a father should share his worldly goods with his adult children, and might with advancing years wisely resign the domestic authority to a son, though with the power of resuming it, should a necessity arise. He thought that no position can well be more miserable than that of an old man who has a passion for rule and is incapable of ruling, who is feared without being respected, who spies and is spied upon, who is viewed only as the senile holder of possessions which are coveted by those who are capable of enjoying them. Next to the verdict of one's own conscience he considered the opinion held of a man in his own household the surest testimony as to character and conduct. "Few men have been admired by their domestics; no man has ever been a prophet, not merely in his own house, but in his country." He bore himself in his household openly: he loved to show frankly all that was in him; to live, as it were, in the full light and the open air. Sometimes a sudden fit of anger came upon him; he did not then consume his own smoke, a process which may darken the countenance for days; his passion if sharp was short; he tried to moderate the little whirl of temper and to accept good humour gladly as soon as it returned. Occasionally he found it expedient to feign anger, for a dull-witted servant can hardly

be ruled by the rod of a refined irony. As to little Léonor, she never saw the rod and never heard from father or mother any words that were not kind. And had his children been sons, Montaigne declares, he would have been even more studious to preserve in them a spirit of frank independence, for the male is less born to subjection than the female—" I should have loved to expand their hearts with ingenuousness and freedom." It was, no doubt, a cause of some regret for him that he was without a son, though he professes that the common desire for an heir male is unreasonable in its degree. There was much in his daughter's upbringing with which Montaigne could not or would not meddle—" feminine polity hath a mysterious procedure; we must e'en leave it to them." Léonor was of a " tardy complexion"—lingering still in childish girlhood, when she might have been expected to have bloomed into womanhood. From her mother and a certain ancient dame, as learned as Lady Capulet's nurse—her mother's assistant—the child acquired the proprieties and the pruderies for which her father had small respect; they formed part of the mysterious feminine polity, and he did not interfere. He taught her, as far as was permissible, frankness and entire truthfulness—truthfulness even in her little sports. When at a later time Montaigne would quit his tower, and

enjoy a game of cards with his wife and daughter, he was punctilious in observing the strictest fairness in play; veracity, which is the bond of society, cannot be too much insisted on. At other times the game was not at cards, but of Montaigne's own invention—one of those clever devices with which clever men puzzle and plague their womankind; the game, we may call it, of extremes and the mean. Mademoiselle de Montaigne—good, busy housekeeper—and Léonor, of the tardy complexion, were challenged to name the greatest number of things in which the extremes had somewhat in common with each other which was not possessed by the mean. Were they too unapt for the sport or too respectful to name among these things a philosopher and a fool? In such a sport Montaigne was sure to win. He had in general renounced games of mingled skill and chance for the unphilosophical reason that he could not bear to be beaten without more disturbance of temper than was agreeable. Chess he hated, because it is too earnest a pursuit, and he chose to concentrate his attention on what yielded a better result.

Frankness and simplicity—these were what Montaigne most cared for in his home. Ceremonious ways might be proper in the courts of kings, but they seemed out of place in the simple house of a country gentleman. The little Léo-

nor was not instructed to address her father by the customary titles of reverence. The word "father" was enough; it signified both reverence and affection. "We call God Almighty 'Father'," Montaigne writes, "and we disdain to have our children call us so; in my family I have reformed that error." If a friend or a stranger took up his abode for a while in the hospitable château, he found that it deserved the name of Liberty Hall. Through ceremonies and formalities, as Montaigne thought, we lose the substance of things for the shadows; "ceremony forbids us to express by words things that are lawful and natural, and we hold by it; reason forbids us to do things unlawful and evil, and we will not listen to it." In the château both the master, his household, and his guests enjoyed an unaccustomed freedom; "there is here a truce to ceremony, to usherings and attendance at departures and such like troublesome rules of courtesy; oh, the servile and importunate custom!" Every one governs himself after his own fashion; he who pleases, may indulge or communicate his thoughts; I sit mute, musing and self-involved, without offence to my guests." Now and again, perhaps, some dignified visitor might be ruffled a little because he had not been greeted on his arrival and conducted with state to the principal apartment. Montaigne comforted himself with

the reflection that it was better to offend a stranger once than incommode himself every day, for that would be a perpetual servitude. He had been carefully taught in his youth the observances of society; he accommodated himself, wherever he went, to the customs of the place; but he would not be tied to a code of artificial manners, and he thought that if a formality is omitted, not through ignorance but discretion, the omission may be as agreeable as the observance. "I have often," he says, "seen men uncivil by overcivility and troublesome in their courtesy."

No one, when he found the right person, enjoyed talk more heartily or entered into it with more spirit than Montaigne. He felt that he was a little too fastidious in the choice of the persons to whom he could open his mind, and he envied those whose facile disposition made them all things to all men. He would have liked to talk to a neighbour of his building, his hunting, his quarrels; to chat with a carpenter or a gardener; to speak not only amiably, as he did, but familiarly with a household retainer, from whom the poor prerogative of fortune ought not to estrange a master. Still he must needs make distinctions; while there were moods in which, contrary to his wont, he could even suffer fools gladly; and, after a manner ascribed at a later time to Addison and to Swift's delightful Stella, would gently lead

them on in their self-conceited folly; in general what he most desired was what he too rarely found—the company of worthy and accomplished men. With regard to the majority of his acquaintances he was content to believe that if he did not give them reason to love him, no man ever gave less occasion of being hated; they knew that he did not surrender himself wholly to them; they may have thought him reserved or even cold; but at least he had excited no animosities, he had offended no susceptibilities. He felt, indeed, that he could not give himself by halves; it must be all or almost nothing; "my motion is not natural, if it be not with full sail." But having found the right man, he abandoned himself to the joy of real communication of his whole self, throwing aside all the servile restraints and reservations of mere prudence—prudence which the dangerous times of the civil wars might seem to make more than ordinarily expedient. Seated with such a companion, Montaigne surprised himself by his own energy of speech, his vivacity, his happy sallies. He found better things than he sought. His mind became the plaything of fortune—fortune the unexpected, the incalculable: "the occasion, the company, the agitation of my own voice, draw forth from my mind more than I find when I sound it and employ it by myself." In comparison with such conversation, which

seemed to him the most fruitful and natural exercise of the mind, he perceived that the study of books is a languishing and feeble motion. If he were compelled to choose, he would rather lose his sight than his hearing and power of speech. He liked best to encounter a rude and vigorous jouster, who would press upon his flanks and prick him right and left; "perfect agreement in conversation is of all things the most tiresome". Knowing the diversity that there is in the minds of men, he was astonished by no proposition, however novel, nor hurt by any confession of faith, how widely soever it might differ from his own. He would listen with tolerance to the most extravagant conceits, or the flightiest tales of wonder, and inwardly ask why he should discredit or deny them—"*Que sçay-je?*" It was not that he was indifferent to truth, but that he thought it a cowardly and ill-policy to close any of the avenues which might by any chance lead to truth. He exposed his own opinions gladly to adverse criticism—the rougher and bolder such criticism the better. Montaigne was prouder to acknowledge bravely that he had been worsted in argument than to snatch a victory by mere strategy and tactics. To be so disinterested was his best homage to reality, to substance and not to show: "I joyously entertain and caress truth in whatever quarter I find it, cheerfully surrender myself

to it, and hold forth my conquered arms to it when from afar off I see it approach." What offended him most in discussion was a neglect of what he styles "order"—the rational form of argument: "When the disputation is irregular and troubled, I leave the thing itself, and cling to the form with anger and indiscretion, flinging myself into a headstrong, malicious, imperious way of debate, for which I am afterwards obliged to blush." But then to deal fairly with a fool is not an easy matter. Nor was it an artificial, scholastic way of handling a subject that Montaigne required; it was rather the free, natural way of good sense; attention to the "knot," as he would call it, of the question considered, a sure and dexterous process of untying it, clear vision, good humour, due regard for the arguments of an opponent; in a word, reasonableness and not the methodic lines of circumvallation of formal logic: "I had rather a son of mine should learn to speak in a tavern than in the schools of prating." "Take a master of arts," he says, "strip him of his gown, his hood, and his Latin, let him not batter our ears with Aristotle pure and crude, and you would take him for one of ourselves, or worse." And yet, after all, why should we be so impatient with another man's way of giving his notions a shape, even if he be a logical or a learned fool? How often we are fools ourselves! We must live

among the living, and "let the river run under the bridge" without our care, or at least without our interference. A hundred times a day we mock ourselves in mocking our neighbour. To know this is perhaps our chief advantage over a self-complacent, obstinate, zealous fool, all aglow with his folly; and a considerable advantage it must be—"Is there any creature so assured, resolved, disdainful, contemplative, grave, and serious as an ass?"

Montaigne's house was always open. Sometimes it was a friend that visited him, like Jacques Pelletier—poet, grammarian, mathematician—who in 1572 or 1573 was invited to accept the headship of the College of Guyenne, in which Montaigne preserved his old friendly interest. It was Pelletier who instructed his host in the properties of the asymptote, which continually approaches a curve and never meets it, a fact demonstrable by reason which yet, Montaigne thought, subverts the truths of experience. And he it was who gave Montaigne a certain precious amulet of gold, whereon were graven some celestial figures, virtuous against sunstroke, but which the new owner, playing benevolently on the imagination of a newly-wedded acquaintance, put to unanticipated uses. The château lay open not to friends only but to foes, and this was part of what its master, with his psychological instinct,

held to be a prudent policy. "Our desires are augmented by difficulty"; therefore no marauder should be tempted to rob him of his worldly goods by the ambition of achieving a feat in the fine art of looting. Wandering bands of soldiers in a disturbed district during the civil wars might have thought it a gallant thing to capture a Catholic gentleman's château if he had defended it; and so Montaigne would have no defence.

"I make their conquest of my house dastardly and treacherous; it is never shut to any one that knocks; it has no other provision but a porter, of ancient custom and ceremony, who does not so much serve to defend my gate as to offer it with more decorum and grace; I have no other guard nor sentinel than what the stars provide me with. A gentleman wrongs himself in making a show of defence, when he cannot thoroughly defend himself. . . . This is my retreat wherein to rest me from the wars. I endeavour to withdraw this corner from the public tempest, as I do another corner in my soul. Our war may change its forms, may multiply and diversify itself into new parties; for my part, I stir not. Among so many houses put in defence, I myself alone amongst those of my rank, so far as I know, in France, have trusted merely to heaven, for the protection of mine, and have never removed plate, deeds, or hangings. I would neither fear nor save myself by halves. If a full acknowledgment can gain the Divine favour, it will remain with me to the end; if not. I have continued long enough to make my continuance remarkable, and worthy of record. How? It is full thirty years." *

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* *Essays*, II, 15.

Montaigne's policy of the open door, so long successful, was not successful to the end. A time came—at the close of his mayoralty of Bordeaux—when his château was pillaged, and its master, with his wife and daughter, fearing the plague more than the irregular soldiery, the *picoreurs*, were wanderers without a home. The confident aspect of the undefended château was reflected in the confidence of Montaigne's face, and on more than one occasion, if we are to believe him, when danger threatened he was saved by his frank countenance and his courageous bearing. A neighbour had planned to surprise Montaigne's house; he professed to be in need of a refuge from pursuers; the gates were opened to him as a matter of course. Presently arrived small parties of his soldiers, all with the same story on their lips. Montaigne's suspicions were aroused, but he resolved to go through with his courtesy and to trust to fortune. The horsemen were at the gate, their leader was within the house; nothing remained to be done except to execute the plan that he had formed. "Often he has said since then," writes Montaigne, "for he was not afraid to tell the tale, that my countenance and my frankness had snatched the treachery out of his hands. He remounted his horse, his followers, who had their eyes upon him, to see what signal he might give them, being much astonished

to find him issue forth and yield up his advantage." *

Montaigne describes his house as situated in the midst of the tumult and trouble of the civil wars; his province was always the first in arms, and the last to lay them down. Guyenne and Gascony were in truth a great wrestling-ground for the rival factions, and they swayed incalculably hither and thither in victory or defeat. The greater number of Montaigne's neighbours were Protestant gentlemen, and he was known to be a Catholic and a royalist. He was neither a sceptic without political convictions, nor a man so indifferent and egoistic that he could not take a side. It would have been pleasant, certainly, to do like the prudent old woman and carry one candle to St. Michael and another to the dragon. Montaigne would follow the better party even to the fire; but, if possible, would omit that last disagreeable incident; he would be swallowed up in the public ruin; but, should there be no need of this, would be well pleased if fortune saved him; and as far as duty gave him leave, he did not neglect self-conservation. If he could escape from a beating by creeping under a calfskin, he was not, he confesses, the man to shrink from such a refuge. These are not heroic utterances; unless,

* *Essays*, III, 12.

indeed, it be heroic to confess that one is not a hero. But, while in the case of a war in other lands it might be possible to remain indifferent, Montaigne felt than in a civil war it would have been treason merely to stand aside and look on. He did not hesitate to speak and to act on behalf of what he regarded as the better cause. Only he would endeavour to hold his own convictions and to act on their behalf in the spirit of moderation, of reasonableness, and, at the same time, to regard his opponents in the temper of equity. He was sufficiently attached to his own party by the bond of reason, and therefore did not need the bondage of wrath and hatred. He could commend a Huguenot poet, or the style, though not the matter, of a Huguenot pamphlet, to do which was almost a proof of heresy. He could celebrate in the same paragraph the courage and constancy of the Constable de Montmorenci, and the unfailing goodness, sweetness of manners, and "conscientious facility" of the Protestant leader, La Noue. He could, when the right time came, centre all his hopes and desires for France —poor vessel staggering under the tempest— upon the person of Henri of Navarre. He detested the spirit which had "filled fraternal hearts with parricidal hatreds", the terrible code of morals which made cruelty a virtue and violence a form of sacred justice. The ancient religion

and government of the kingdom ought assuredly to be maintained, but a Catholic and a royalist should remember that those arrayed against him were Frenchmen—and that they were men. Religion, which should form men to its own high ends, had been shaped anew by them to their own worst designs:

"They who have taken it on the left hand, they who have taken it on the right, they who call it black, they who call it white, alike employ it in their violent and ambitious enterprises, and conduct themselves in relation to it with a progress so alike in riot and injustice that they render the diversity they pretend in their opinions, in a matter on which the conduct and law of our life depend, doubtful and almost incredible; could one see morals more akin, more absolutely identical, issue from one and the same school and discipline? See the horrible impudence with which we toss divine reasons to and fro, and how irreligiously we have both rejected and retaken them according as fortune has shifted our places in these public storms." *

Montaigne had seen the sufferings of the peasantry—feet roasted upon gridirons, fingers crushed under the pistol-cocks, bloody eyes squeezed out by cords—and he had marvelled at their endurance. "A monstrous war!" he cries; ". . . all discipline flies it; it comes to cure sedition, and is itself full of the same evil; would chastise disobedience and is itself the example; and, employed for the defence of the laws, is itself

* *Essays*, II, 12.

a rebel to its own." At such a time to despair would have been easy.

Nor had his own spirit of moderation given Montaigne immunity from suffering; rather, in some respects, it had enhanced the difficulties and dangers of his position: "I was spoiled on all hands; to the Ghibelline I was a Guelph; to the Guelph, a Ghibelline." Formal accusations were not laid against him; no foundation existed for these; but mute suspicions crept about him in underhand ways, and it was his way not to evade these, not to justify or explain himself, but to sit silent, or sometimes even ironically to assert his guilt. A thousand times as he lay down at night to sleep, he questioned whether he would ever see the morning. One should live among one's neighbours by right, but he felt that he lived by sufferance or by favour. His losses might be endured, but the offence of wanton outrages was hard to bear with equanimity. Now and again a spasm of fear seized him as to the future of himself and his household, and there was nothing that he feared so much as fear itself. And yet when he looked back at the worst of these years he felt almost ashamed to confess how much repose and tranquillity were his amid the ruin of his country. Custom itself benumbed the sense of many evils. His health had been good, and how few of the blessings of life are equal to

health! There was a kind of bitter comfort in reflecting that if France had fallen, the fall was from no great height; the state of society even before the civil wars had not been one of Utopian happiness. He tried to assure himself that even when the contexture of society seems desperately rent, somehow it still holds together; that the shuffling and jostling of atoms somehow results in a readjustment; that under all disorder lies a law of order mysteriously at work. It was not a period of strange alteration for France alone; other states were also menaced by some vast process of change. "Everything about us crumbles"; but "all that totters does not fall"; or if everything falls, nothing is felt to fall. "The contexture of so great a body holds by more nails than one; it holds even by its antiquity, like old buildings, whose base has been worn away by time, without mortar or coating, which yet support themselves by their own weight." The troubles of the time helped above all to make Montaigne seek for strength not in things around him, not in the future, but in the citadel of his own soul. We so often run after airy and distant hopes; we so seldom arrive at ourselves; and if we arrive at ourselves it is sometimes late in the day, when we are tired and faint. He could think with satisfaction that it was his fortune to live in an age which at least

was not idle, languishing, or effeminate. And for a spectator there was a strange interest—like that of one who watches some portentous tragedy upon the stage—in assisting at the agony of an ancient kingdom. "Good historians fly from calm narration, as from stagnant water and a dead sea, to return to seditions and wars, to which they know that we summon them." Yes—Montaigne, the artist, could not but feel a certain fascination in the unfolding of a drama, where great actors played their parts and even the simple clowns might deserve applause. Montaigne, the student of human nature, had an ample field of observation, where good and evil passions were naked to his view, and the behaviour of that singular creature, man, could be studied under the most varying conditions and in the testing crises of events.

CHAPTER VIII

WRITING THE ESSAYS

In the interval between 1571, the date of Montaigne's withdrawal to "the bosom of the Muses", and 1580, the date of publication, the first two books of the *Essays* were written. They were the leisurely accumulation or growth of nine years, embodying the wisdom of mature manhood. It is probable that they had their origin in the writer's custom of annotating certain books which he had read with special attention, of annotating them and adding at the close a brief estimate of the work or of the merits and defects of the author. The satisfaction which he felt in seeing his own thought fixed in written words, so preserved from the fluctuations of his feelings and from the treachery of his memory, led him on to make essays of his judgment, essays of his "natural faculties", on other topics which came before him from time to time. At first Montaigne may have had no design of publication in view; the jottings from books and the records of his own ideas may have been regarded only as private memoranda; but a writer of genius, who can express himself on hardly any subject without

originality of conception and of manner and who has a delight in all the inventions of literary style, is before very long caught in the web which he himself has spun. Gradually Montaigne found himself entangled in his own delight, and could not choose to escape from it. The writer of disconnected memoranda was transformed into an author. For a time he was his own public; but as he contemplated what lay before him, he perceived that it had in it an appeal for other minds, and he became one of a larger public with whom the most sociable of writers could now enjoy an endless conversation, while conversing with himself.

The *Essays* themselves give various accounts of the motives which brought them into being, and probably in each account there is a fragment of the entire truth. In his retirement there were times when Montaigne suffered from the tedium of solitude; a "melancholic humour", very much out of accord with his natural complexion, threatened to lay hold upon him; he needed some occupation to banish his ennui, and he took up his pen and found that he was happily astir. But to write was not only a stimulus; it was also a control. A rich soil that lies idle produces all manner of troublesome weeds; so it is with the mind, which if not occupied and restrained runs into every kind of extravagances in the vague field of

the imagination. When he retired to his own house, he tells us, intending, as far as might be, to pass in repose the short remainder of his life, he supposed that he could do himself no better service than to let his mind entertain itself, as it should please, in entire idleness. He hoped that years had tamed his spirit, and brought it within the bounds of reason. But it proved otherwise. Like a horse broken loose from the rider, his mind flung up its heels and started on an extravagant career. "It gives birth to so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one upon another, without order or design, that to contemplate at my ease their ineptitude and strangeness I have begun to set them down in a roll, hoping with time to make my mind ashamed of itself." There was never any very acute shame in Montaigne's contemplation of his chimeras, for he did not aspire to be an angel or a Cato; he was only, he would reflect, a specimen of the average human being, with certain advantages arising from the fact that he recognised his monsters as fantastic; and it was not his business to play the weeping philosopher of humanity, when it was more agreeable and perhaps more effective to smile. But, in truth, he did not at first take himself for the central subject of his study. On whatever matter happened to interest him he made the trial of his judgment, and every matter proved fertile; a fly

would serve as well as a philosopher or an envoy of state. To be started on a train of meditation was all that he required—"I take the first argument that fortune offers me; they are all equally good for me; I never design to treat them in their totality, for I never see the whole of anything, nor do those see it who promise to show it to us. Of a hundred members and faces which each thing has, I take one, sometimes to touch it only lightly or to graze the surface, and sometimes to pinch it to the bone; I give a stab not as wide but as deep as I can, and in general I love to seize things by some unwonted lustre." The judgment was an instrument which had always its uses. If the subject was one which he did not understand, he used his judgment to sound the depth of the ford, and finding it too deep for one of his stature, he kept to the bank. If the subject was frivolous, the judgment was an instrument which might give it substance and support. If the subject was a noble one, already trodden and trampled into a thousand paths, the judgment had still its opportunity in discovering the best of all those paths.

The master faculty worked in mysterious ways; not always deliberately; often spontaneously, oracularly, suddenly, carrying one away, persuading or dissuading, speaking with authority, not balancing and weighing, as the judgment ordinarily does, but presenting itself like some

unexpected fiat of the will. What else but this was the demon of Socrates? And have we not, each of us, our demon? Montaigne's best thoughts came to him when he seemed to seek them least; and, to his grief, they often vanished as quickly—gifts of the gods, but snatched away by some invisible harpies. Such thoughts offered themselves as he lay in bed, or sat at table, or on horseback—especially on horseback, for the stir in the blood somehow set his mind astir and made it quick and apprehensive. But if they were not captured and secured on the moment, only a vain image remained with him, like the shadow of a lost dream which haunts us after waking.

The subjects which set him thinking as he rode through the country or sat in his library might be remote from Michel de Montaigne; yet somehow Michel de Montaigne almost always consciously or unconsciously played his part in the meditation. Even on a wholly detached theme it was his own judgment which was defining itself. He could not think or write like a pedant whose wisdom lies all on his shelves and not in his own consciousness, his own experience. Good and evil, he held, reside not so much in things themselves as in our opinion of things, the way we regard them, the way we deal with them; and therefore if he sought for wisdom and knowledge, he must to a great extent seek it in himself, in the form im-

posed on things by his own mind, in his opinions, in his feelings, in his habits of living, even in his trivial peculiarities, for these might have some significance which he did not wholly comprehend, and more might be implied by them than appeared upon the surface. Thus, without at first entertaining such a design, he was drawing, pencil-stroke by pencil-stroke, a portrait of himself. The features of a man began to look out upon him from the drawing-board, and the features were his own. A new motive and a new pleasure entered into Montaigne's work; he would complete by a multitude of touches seemingly casual yet nicely calculated, this work of art, and it should remain as a memorial of him with his friends. A foolish project! Pascal afterwards pronounced it; a foolish project to occupy one's self with this hateful thing, the *ego*. But Montaigne, with easier wisdom, maintained that if he was playing the fool, at least it was at his own expense; his folly would die with him and would create no train of evil consequences. And he did not, in truth, regard the project as foolish. The attainment of self-knowledge was no fool's task, but an arduous undertaking for those who would be wise. "It is a thorny enterprise, and more so than it seems, to follow a pace so vagabond as that of the soul, to penetrate the dark profundities of its internal windings, to choose and lay hold of

so many little modes of its motions; it is a new and extraordinary amusement which withdraws us from the common occupations of the world; yes, and from those most recommended. It is now many years since I have had no aim for my thoughts save myself, since I have supervised and studied only myself; and if I study aught else it is straightway to lay it upon, or, to speak more accurately, within myself. And I do not think I err, if, as is done in other sciences incomparably less profitable, I communicate what I have learnt in this, though I am ill satisfied with the progress I have made." If Montaigne's way of self-study were to be dignified with the name of a method, —a word inappropriate enough with such a writer—we should have to describe it as the method of observation, the empirical, or—shall we say?—the experimental method. He started with no *a priori* assumptions, theological or philosophical; he did not systematise his results; he made no attempt even to unify the record of his thoughts and feelings under any theoretical conception of himself; he was content to set down an observation here and another observation there; if the Montaigne of to-day differed from the Montaigne of yesterday, he recorded the present and immediate fact; he differed from himself as much as from other men; he was one of a diverse and undulant species. Yet an ideal con-

ception of himself gradually formed itself in his mind; a unity in multiplicity gradually became apparent; and there was a certain artistic pleasure in giving salience to those traits which served best to illustrate and expound this, his own ideal of Montaigne. And why should he not speak of himself? The rule to be silent with respect to one's self is only a bridle for calves! Neither the saints, who speak of themselves so loftily, nor the philosophers, nor the theologians tolerate such a curb.

Montaigne was not a saint; nor did he claim for himself the title of philosopher. He professed himself no more than the average man. And precisely for this reason he had the better right to be communicative about himself; through his representation of an average man—neither a saint nor a beast—he was really exhibiting humanity itself; "each man carries in his own person the entire form of the condition of the race". He offered himself to the world, if the world chose to take him so, as a specimen of the genus *homo*, as one of themselves. To his friends he offered the portrait of Michel de Montaigne. He was not erecting the statue of an illustrious individual in the great square of a city, in a church, or any public place. It was for the corner of a library, to entertain a neighbour, a kinsman, a friend. There was not so much of good in

him that he could not tell it without blushing. Here, as the author in his opening words informs the reader, his end was private and domestic; when his friends had lost him, they might find him here, his humours and conditions, his few merits and his many defects. Had he lived among those nations which dwell under the sweet liberty of the primitive laws of nature, he would gladly have painted his portrait at full length and without a rag of clothing. All the worth of his book lay in the fact that it was "a book of good faith". And yet the other thought, that in painting himself he was painting the human creature, and not merely an individual, was always in the "back-shop" of Montaigne's mind. He could not construct a foursquare body of philosophy; he was not a system-maker or system-monger; yet one thing he might give as his gift to the world—some scattered notes on that curious creature, man, as seen in the example which lay nearest to his observations; as seen in himself.

As he proceeded with his task, which was also his recreation, he began to perceive that his book was reacting upon his character. He did not form his book more than his book was forming him. After all, the portrait had in it something of an ideal. He was sometimes hasty and intemperate, but here he was giving pledges to reasonableness and moderation. He was often tempted

to exclaim "All or nothing", but here he pleaded for the wisdom of the mean, the "*juste milieu*". He sometimes wearily gave over the search for truth, and despaired of any certitude, but here he declared that the world is a school of inquisition; to enter it is not the great point, but to run the fairest course; the chase is our business, our game; we are inexcusable if we conduct the chase carelessly and ill; to fail in capturing the game is another matter; we were born to pursue the quest for truth; to possess it belongs to a higher power. Thus the *Essays* became to their author in some measure a rule of conduct; or, if not a rule, for he loved to live in the freedom of the present moment, at least an impulse and a guide. Montaigne had become through them in some degree the director of his own conscience, his own Seneca, and also his own gentle and encouraging counsellor and companion, his more intimate Plutarch.

Perhaps, too, his book would prove useful to others. Perhaps from among those who had found it helpful to them or who cared for the portrait he had drawn, he might win a friend. "Oh! a friend"—the cry or the sigh of Montaigne in the text of 1588 no longer appears with the same directness in the edition published after his death. He thought of what the friendship of La Boétie had been to him in his earlier man-

hood; and now age, with its stealing step, had crept upon him. Friendship—sweeter and more necessary than the elements of water and fire! He would go very far to find a friend; and indeed in the self-confessions of his book he had already gone more than half way. Could it be that a bookseller's shop might bring him the friend he sought? We know that Montaigne's hope was in a measure fulfilled. He found, indeed, no second La Boétie. But his book brought him two later friends—the enthusiastic young lady whom he adopted as his spiritual daughter, and a philosophic disciple, perhaps a little of the pedant, yet one who was also a thinker; and no master should judge too severely a devoted famulus, even though he be a Wagner; or, what is considerably better than a Wagner, a Pierre Charron.

To render some service to others—this was assuredly one of the motives which impelled and sustained Montaigne in his delightful labours, egoist though he sometimes professed himself. Did he exhibit his own faults or defects? Well, this might be of use as a warning to others. Did he point to the infirmities of the intellect of man? This should touch at once the dogmatists who would forever moor in some oozy haven the voyaging spirit of man, and those wild speculators who would subvert the old order of society for the

sake of a theory. He could not dazzle men with a vision of great hope, as Rabelais had done; then it was the morning, and now the noon hung heavy and clouds had overcast the heavens. But he might do what perhaps was needed by his time—he could plead for sanity. The future of his country depended on the presence in it of a group—possibly an enlarging group—of men who were sane, who could play the part of reconcilers between the madness of extremes, who were not blinded by authority or by custom, who were universal questioners, who were pliable to the touch of reality, who dared to doubt as well as to believe, who took, as he did, the balance for their emblem, and who could pause to weigh things before they applied themselves to action. Of zeal and passion there was enough; there was too much. It were better for France if men were less zealous if only they were more sane.

Trenchant critic of the vices and errors of his own time as Montaigne was, he did not declaim in the manner of a preacher. His tone was that of conversation: "I speak to paper as I do to the first person I meet." But what a conversation it is! how rich in ideas! how vivid and opalescent in expression! And, doubtless, the chief motive for continuing to write endlessly, whenever the mood came upon him, was the delight which he felt in writing. He talks in his easy, engaging

way of the vanity of scribbling; he could not spell, forsooth; he never knew how to place a comma or a period; this scribbling propensity was only the idle humour of a very idle man. There should be a law against foolish and impertinent authors; though in his time, indeed, doing ill was so common that to do what was only vain and useless had in it a kind of commendation. Such was Montaigne's way of wearing his wisdom and his art lightly, to all appearance, and so insinuating himself into his reader's good graces, disarming opposition with his humour of self-depreciation, which was meant to deceive no one. But, in truth, he enjoyed, as much as any man ever did, the triumphs of a great virtuoso performing upon his divine instrument. No one felt more than he that the right word, the word which lives with a strong corporeal life, springs from intensity of vision; that style, as we call it, is simply the body of thought, and that nothing proper to us is either wholly corporeal or incorporeal. If his *Essays* were praised, it ought not to be for their language, nor yet precisely for their matter, but for the form impressed upon the matter by his mind, of which spiritual form the language was only the inevitable consequence. And therefore he was in the highest degree curious and scrupulous about the language which he would not wish to see praised by any one apart

from the spiritual form. "Cupid is a felon god"—"*Cupidon est un dieu felon*": the earlier text had, as the epithet, the word "*ambitieux*"; Montaigne felt his way a little nearer to his meaning and wrote "*arrogant*". No! that was not right, and he replaced it with "*mutin*". Finally came, as he believed, the inevitable, unalterable word—"*un dieu felon*".* Yet there is no appearance of curiosity, of painful research; there is not a touch of preciosity in his style. "May I use no words," he writes, "but those which are current in the Paris markets." His utterance seems to be, and no doubt in great part it was, in the highest degree spontaneous, as if he caught his prey at the first bound. Its characteristic, at its best, lies in the union of strength with ease. To the imagination it is a perpetual feast, with its litheness of movement, its iridescence, its ideas incarnated in metaphors, metaphors often homely yet each a fresh surprise; always original, always his own. And out of this admirably pedestrian prose rises now and again a lyric cry (all the more poignant and penetrating because to be a poet is not the writer's trade); now a cry of indignation, now a cry of pity, now the cry of memory or of desire. And

* Noted from the Bordeaux copy of *Essays* (1588) with autograph corrections, by Gustave Brunet: *Les Essais, Leçons inédites*, p. 15.

sometimes the page is one of a superb rhetoric, ample and sonorous, like that in the *Apology for Raimond de Sebonde*, which humiliates man in presence of the starry heavens, a passage that may possibly have suggested a rapture of Hamlet, which also proves to what sublime uses prose may be applied:

"Let us consider then, for the present, man alone, without foreign help, armed only with his own arms, and deprived of the Divine grace and knowledge, which is all his honour, his strength, and the foundation of his being; let us see what posture is his in this goodly equipage. Let him make me understand by force of reasoning on what foundation he has built those great advantages which he thinks he has over other creatures. Who has persuaded him that the admirable movement of the celestial vault, the eternal light of those luminaries (*flambeaux*) rolling so proudly over his head, the tremendous movements of that infinite sea, were established, and continue so many ages, for his commodity and service? Is it possible to imagine any thing so ridiculous as this miserable and wretched creature, who is not so much as master of himself, exposed to the injuries of all things, and who yet names himself master and emperor of the universe, of which it is not in his power to know the least part, much less to command it? And this privilege which he attributes to himself of being the only creature in this vast fabric who has the capacity to know its beauty and all its chambers, the only creature who can render thanks to the architect, and keep account of the revenues and outgoings of the world—who has sealed him this privilege? Let him show us his letters patent for this great and noble charge."

No writer is at once so translatable and so untranslatable as Montaigne. After much has

been lost in the rendering, so much remains that almost any version seems full and sufficient. But compare it with the original, and it will appear that the best translation is indeed the wrong side of the tapestry; the colour of the original is enfeebled; the concentrated force of phrases, when Montaigne gives one of his swift, deep stabs, has to be expanded and attenuated; the incessant imagery has often to be surrendered; only its significance and not the visible aspect and gesture can be brought over into another language than that of the writer.

Montaigne had not the happy self-satisfaction of those authors who sun themselves in the perfection of their own work. He found what he had written "excusable" in view of things that were worse; but he saw, beyond his own achievement, the unattainable beauty; "I have always an idea in my soul, and a certain troubled image, which presents me as in a dream some better form than I have made to serve my needs; but I cannot lay hold of it nor work it out; and even that idea itself attains only to mediocrity." The productions of the great and rich souls of former times were far beyond the utmost bounds of his imagination or his desire; "their writings"—and we cannot doubt that he speaks in all sincerity—"not only satisfy and fill me, but they astound me and ravish me with admiration." To

such beauty as theirs he did not dare even to aspire. He could not anticipate what the fortune of his book might be; perhaps the work was better than the workman. Sometimes he placed the *Essays* high in his esteem, and then again their value seemed to fall, and he looked at them with a discouraged gaze. He wrote, as he sometimes believed, only for a few men and those of a few years. Had he hoped for distant fame, he should have written in a language less subject to alteration than his own. French seemed to slip through his fingers every day; during his own lifetime, he thought, it had changed to the extent of one-half. As for the glory of authorship, in his own Gascony, they looked upon it as a drollery that Michel de Montaigne should be seen in print. Farther off things were somewhat better indeed—"I buy printers in Guyenne; elsewhere they buy me." But whatever might be the value of contemporary praise, he tried to assure himself that posthumous praise, given to him either as a man or as an author, was of far less account. And yet he thought that a man might rejoice in the strength and the beauty of his spiritual offspring with even a finer joy than in the sons and daughters begotten of his body. Of such offspring the single parent is both father and mother; they have no beauty or grace of their own which is not derived from him. Montaigne

would not say but that he might rather choose to be the father of a very beautiful child through his commerce with the Muse than of one born to him by his wife. He doubted much that Phidias would have been as anxious for the preservation of a living boy or girl of his own as of some admirable statue which with long labour and study he had fashioned to perfection. The offspring of the soul, as Plato held, are the immortal children. Such words of Montaigne are not to be taken as exhibiting any lack of paternal tenderness, but rather as evidencing his enthusiasm for artistic beauty.

The essays are, as is natural, of very unequal merit. Some are mere notes on subjects which have little or no relation to life and character. If the essays appropriated by the servant-man, who thought he had obtained a treasure in his master's manuscripts, were of a kind like unto that on *Thumbs* or that on *Posting*, we can bear our loss with equanimity. Although a fly might be enough to set Montaigne's mind in motion, he is at his best only when he deals with some serious matter of human life or some of the great powers or the infirmities of human nature. We cannot, indeed, found our anticipations respecting the interest of an essay on the title at its head. That on *Coaches* contains a majestic description of the pomps of ancient Rome and an eloquent denun-

ciation of the perfidies of the conquerors of the New World; when it is time to utter the words, "Return we to our coaches," the essay is ended, and only the reverberation of its lofty music lives in our memory. The Essayist's career has been somewhat extravagantly run on horseback, and at the close it is the King of Peru, and not we, whose carriage stops the way. When Montaigne wanders from his professed theme, why should we quarrel with him? He never wanders from himself, and from humanity which is his true theme. If he goes out of the beaten track "it is rather by license than oversight". His fantasies follow one another, but "sometimes with a wide interval"; they look towards one another, but sometimes with an oblique glance. "I love a poetic progress, by leaps and skips; it is an art, as Plato says, light, fleeting, and demonic. . . . It is the indiligent reader who loses my subject, and not I; there will always be found some word or other in a corner, that will prove sufficient, though closely couched." He does not care to link matter with matter by formal connections, and supposes that there may be as much continuity in a rivulet as in a chain. Such an apology for his leaps and "gambades" means that Montaigne in his *Essays* does not write treatises, nor deliver speeches, but converses with himself and his readers. The unity which each possesses

is not that of formal arrangement but the unity of a mind at play with us and with itself. We come to his book not to exhaust a subject, but to hold converse with a friend.

"The word is late," wrote Bacon of his *Essays*, "but the thing is ancient." In the application which he gave to it, the word seems to be an extension of use due to Montaigne. But he was not without models for "the thing". The *Discours* of his French, the *Discorsi* of his Italian, contemporaries are often of a kind similar to Montaigne's *Essays;* their subjects are in many instances identical with the subjects of his choice. His originality consists, as he himself would put it, not in "artificialising nature" in a new literary form, but in "naturalising art". He gave the *Discourse*, if not greater freedom of digression, certainly greater spontaneity; he made it less of a miniature treatise and more of a conversation. Above all, he made it personal; he took away from it any pretence to an absolute or abstract exposition of truth; he made all the views of things presented relative to himself; he animated the *Discourse* with his own individuality, the vital spirit of a living man, and through what is personal he reached forth towards what is universal.

The portrait which Montaigne has drawn of himself emerges from the entire canvas of the

Essays for him who stands at the right point of view. Regarded from one position we discover in the book a series of *Discourses*, moral, politic, and military. Moving aside, and looking at it obliquely, the portrait exhibits itself. In the Third Book, published eight years after the first two, Montaigne allows himself to be more garrulous than he had previously been. Not because he had reached those years when men are apt to babble of themselves; in 1588 Montaigne was only midway between fifty and sixty, which latter age he never reached. Not for this reason, but because he had grown more intimate with his public and could afford to be more confidential; because the author of the *Essays* was a personage interesting to many, and in days when the professional "interviewer" did not exist, he must play the part of his own interviewer on behalf of the friendly reader; because, looking at the portrait he had painted, he perceived that many little touches could be added to it, and he desired that it should not leave out a wrinkle or a mole. In the Second Book the essay on *Presumption* is that most copiously communicative about the author. In the Third Book the most frank garrulities are found in the admirable essay on *Experience*, which concludes the entire series. Montaigne had become "his own metaphysic, his own physic", and how could he study himself too

minutely? It was through the long attention which he had employed in considering himself that he had become qualified to judge—"passably", at least—of others. It was through this long attention that he had learned something of the nature of that frail thing—a human creature. Even the failures in his attempt to understand himself were light-bearing, if not fruit-bearing, experiments; "we must push against a door to ascertain that it is bolted against us".

The essay *Of Presumption* tells much of Montaigne's natural characteristics; that *Of Experience* much of his acquired habits. He distinguished between the form of self-esteem which leads us to set too little value upon other persons and that which leads us to set too great a value upon ourselves. He rejoiced, he tells us elsewhere, and the *Essays* give ample proof that he spoke truly, in the virtue of those great and incomparable spirits that shine upon us from the past—a Socrates, an Alexander, an Epaminondas—spirits that are admirable not through a single faculty, but through a comprehensive and various possession of eminent powers. Other men might speak cynically of the virtue of these exalted souls; for his part, he could not meanly endeavour to lower in value what he felt to be so precious, so inestimable. As to himself, he believed that his error lay in esteeming things

at less than their true value because they happened to be his own. The house, the horse of a neighbour, though no better than his own, were viewed by him with more favourable eyes because they were not his. He felt that he was unjust to himself; tried to alter his humour; and fell back into the old way. He had bodily strength; and for long that blessing of blessings, perfect health. But he thought of what went to counterbalance these advantages—his shortness of stature, his somewhat ungraceful figure, the clumsiness of his hands in whatever required dexterity or skill. Vigour of body he possessed, but lightness, alertness were wanting to him. And so, he believed, it was also with his mind; it moved heavily, or did not move at all, unless under the stimulus and excitement of pleasure. Yet, in truth, his mind when roused was highly sensitive, eager in its curiosity, and often needed lead more than wings. This, however, was either when he pursued ideas rather than action, or else when the action was swift and impulsive. Montaigne shrank from the deliberation which precedes action that is considerate. All the reasons for and against any course of conduct were present to his mind; it cost him infinite pain to decide and constrain himself to the voluntary servitude of his own will. His years of meditation, no doubt, years of floating hither and thither among ideas, tended to

enfeeble his power of volition. Yet when he had decided, he could adapt himself to what he had himself made inevitable, a part, as it were, of fortune or of fate. It was perhaps the chief infirmity of his character that he was always more ready to fit his own temper to things than to alter things to correspond with his own ideas and feelings. This is the infirmity of those who live an interior life, and who aim at an equanimity which they do not attain. Self-reformation seems to such men the only valuable kind of reform; but it is the readiness to accept as inevitable a condition of things which may be altered that, in fact, needs to be reformed. Had a hinge of his library door grated, we can imagine that Montaigne, like another great humourist, might have waxed eloquent upon door-hinges, but he could never have discovered that three drops of oil with a feather and a smart stroke of a hammer might have saved his honour for ever. In truth, the amendments we effect in things external react upon our own character. But, except when the tortures of his malady drove him abroad to drink the waters, Montaigne preferred a course of Stoical moralising, which, he was aware, was often more verbal than real, to casting himself into the infinite sea of action, where every decision would have cost him a world of pains in balancing his scruples and his drams. When he acted, as on occasions

he did, with energy and promptitude, it was under the authority of his Socratic demon. His complexion, as he says, was delicate; he had, from early boyhood, lived much at his ease; he was disposed to think that, life and health excepted, there was nothing for which he need bite his nails. Yet Montaigne was by no means lethargic; his physical energy and endurance were great; his voice was loud and full of manly vigour; his speech was bold and frank; he was all alive, having quicksilver, he tells us, in his very heels; he cared supremely for reality, for the substance and not the shadows of things; he liked a strenuous assailant in debate; he never sought his case by the cowardly short-cut of a lie. Only, all the movements of his mind must be in perfect freedom and in pursuit of his proper game. He would not, or he could not, cast up an account; he never would untie his bundle of title-deeds and afflict his brain with their legal jargon; he hardly knew one coin from another; he might, for all the difference that he could perceive, call his barley rye or his lettuce cabbage; he would not be bullied by practical persons into acquiring useful knowledge, or by pedants into acquiring the useless knowledge, which is their pride. How to enjoy loyally his own being was the only knowledge worth the research of Montaigne. To enjoy loyally his own being—

that indeed was an absolute, almost a divine, perfection.

To such self-revealments as these Montaigne adds, and especially in the later essays, many petty details which yet are not all insignificant and help to make us as intimate with the owner of the château as one might have become, who, like Pater's Gaston de Latour, had been a visitor within its walls for months. In customary, habitual ways Montaigne found a certain freedom; they released him from many small embarrassments; but habits may grow into a tyranny, and he thought that a young man at least would do well at times to cross his own rules. He himself was naturally pliant and flexible, and he believed that the best of all habits is the habit of flexibility. And yet as he grew older he found that in little things he was falling into a groove. He could not be comfortable out-of-doors unless he were braced and buttoned and wore his gloves; yet man in a state of nature does not find gloves a necessity. He needed at table his fine, clear drinking-glasses, though he drank wine but moderately, and never beer; he needed his napkin, for in eating he used his awkward fingers more than fork or spoon; at his two full meals—swiftly despatched—he ate abundantly whatever came before him, preferring fish to flesh and not disdaining a hearty enjoy-

ment of his food. He liked to lie on a hard bed, but he could not dispense with bed-hangings, and he even thought that a prudent traveller should take these with him on his journeyings. Eight or nine hours of uninterrupted sleep were not too many for him, and to rise at seven o'clock was for Montaigne to rise early; yet when occasion demanded it, or sometimes with no other motive than to break a habit, he could be content with as little sleep as any one. When resting in the daytime he did not doze; but the little man liked to sit with his heels higher than his seat, and to scratch his ears, for scratching is "one of Nature's sweetest gratifications", and not unworthy in a philosopher. Even in this indulgence, however, as experience instructed him, a philosopher should endeavour to avoid violence and excess, never passing beyond the wise mean of prudent titillation.

Let us leave Montaigne in his pleasant attitude, engaged in his meditative recreation, and let us consider what thoughts occupied his busy brain—the philosophy and not the philosopher. The two, however, cannot in reality be separated, and perhaps the word "philosophy" sounds too ambitious, too suggestive of system. It is wiser to speak of Montaigne's body of thought, not as a system, but as some of his ideas concerning human nature and human life.

CHAPTER IX

THE SPIRIT OF THE ESSAYS

THOSE well-known words which form what might be called the epilogue to the *Essays* give in little the central result of all Montaigne's diverse and wandering inquisitions after truth:

"It is an absolute perfection, and as it were divine, for a man to know how to enjoy loyally his being. We seek for other conditions because we understand not the use of our own, and go forth from ourselves because we know not what abides within us. If we mount us on stilts, well and good, for on stilts it is still our own legs we walk on; and sit we upon the highest throne of the world, yet sit we upon our own tail. The fairest lives, in my conceit, are those which adapt themselves to the common and human model, with order but without miracle, without extravagance. Old age has a little need to be handled more tenderly. Let us recommend it to that God, who is the protector of health and wisdom, but blithe and social."

Is this an easy doctrine of hedonism? Whether we name it hedonism or not, Montaigne did not account it easy; he thought all other attainments less rare and difficult than mastery in the art of loyally enjoying our being. A life at once truly human and complete in all its parts is "the great and glorious masterpiece of man". To reign, to lay up treasure, to build—these are easy

things, mere "appendices" of true living. Have you known—he asks—how to meditate and manage your life? You have accomplished the greatest work of all. Have you known how to regulate your conduct? You have done more than he who has composed books. Have you known how to take repose? You have done more than he who has taken empires and cities.

For the art of loyally enjoying our being we might substitute the expression: the art of living completely and living aright. And why should this be difficult to attain? Such was the thought of Wordsworth's Matthew, the "gray-haired man of glee". The blackbird and the lark "Let loose their carols when they please, Are quiet when they will"—they know unerroneous energy and exquisite repose:

> "With Nature never do *they* wage
> A foolish strife; they see
> A happy youth, and their old age
> Is beautiful and free."

Montaigne often recurs to the old formula—"to live according to Nature"; to live thus is to live completely and aright; it is to enjoy loyally one's own being. Wordsworth's Matthew passes from the life of the lark and blackbird to that of humanity with the words, "But we are pressed by heavy laws." Montaigne refuses to recognise

these heavy laws as Natural; he declares that we have forged them ourselves, that we are our own oppressors.

With this thought in his mind he indulges in the fancy that the primitive races, the newly-discovered peoples of the West, the "cannibals", as we call them, have certain real advantages over the races which we name civilised. The "cannibals" are surely nearer to Nature than we; the laws of Nature still govern them, if not in perfect purity, yet less vitiated by custom than they are with us. If they "wear no breeches" (which is sad), yet they have not even the words that signify lying, treachery, dissimulation, avarice, envy, detraction; and in this there is some compensation. But to see the happiness of a state of society which approaches the state of Nature, we need not survey mankind at so great a distance as Peru or Prospero's island. We need not go beyond the foot of the mountains where, at Lahontan, Montaigne himself had a share in the patronage of a benefice. The little state from the remotest antiquity had preserved its own peculiar manners, customs, and laws. It avoided all alliances and commerce with the outer world. No judge ever crossed its borders; the voice of no advocate was ever heard within its bounds; no physician was there to invent high-sounding names for trivial maladies and prescribe per-

nicious drugs. In the last essay of the Second Book Montaigne tells how the first notary played the part of the serpent in this happy Eden, and how the doctor of medicine followed in his train. The happy people of Lahontan have since then been afflicted with a thousand legal quarrels and a legion of newly-invented diseases.

Montaigne does not, like Rousseau, erect his whimsy, as he might call it, into a doctrine. His humorous praise of the cannibals is partly the dream of a poet, partly an advocate's statement of a case against the vices of civilisation in his own day—its treacheries of statecraft, its cruelties of fratricidal war. But nurtured as he was when a child among peasants, seeing their sufferings, their loyalty, their boundless endurance, and being himself often fatigued in heart and brain by the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world, which they felt not at all, or bore so lightly and so bravely, Montaigne believed that, if we have gained much, we have also lost much by our complexities of thought and our refinements or perversions of the elementary passions of humanity. We cannot return to the simple state of the peasant; having once eaten of the insane root which ravages the brain with the disease of speculation, we can heal our malady only by pursuing the problems that harass us until we have solved them or ascertained that they are in-

soluble. A hasty agnosticism is, indeed, treason against the intellect of man. It is our business to pursue the truth, and there is joy in the pursuit. But if, in the end, we learn that to possess the truth respecting many curious questions belongs to a Higher Power than our reason, shall we be afraid to confess this truth itself, which is the result of our long research? And may not the admission of our ignorance be an important step towards that loyal enjoyment of our being, in its real fulness and in its alloted sphere, which is our end? For such high enjoyment we need action and we need repose. How shall we act aright if we waste our energy in a sphere which is not proper to us? How shall we rest if we are tormented by desires for that which it is not given us to attain?

But the knowledge of our ignorance is to be won only by a persistent reaching forth to the utmost bounds of our knowledge. "No generous mind can stop in itself; it ever makes claims and goes beyond its strength; it has sallies beyond its effects; if it does not advance and press forward, and retire, and drive home, and recoil upon itself and turn about, it is but half alive." There is an "abecedarian" ignorance, Montaigne declares, which goes before knowledge, and a "doctoral" ignorance which follows after knowledge—"an ignorance which knowledge makes and en-

genders, even as it unmakes and destroys the first." The simple peasants are worthy folks; so too are the philosophers, strong and perspicacious spirits, enriched with an ample instruction in the profitable sciences. In the middle region between the two, and in understandings of average capacity, instructed but not fully instructed (and Montaigne would place himself among these) arise all the errors of vain opinions. The hasty half-views of truth, which such persons attain, induce them to quit the old paths in which their fathers walked; they are the illuminated, the men of the *Aufklärung*, the revolutionary doctrinaires, dangerous, inept, importunate; sitters between two stools, who sooner or later come to the ground; mongrels, who have scorned the abecedarian ignorance and have not the faculty to ascend to the doctoral. From among great souls, more composed, more clear-sighted, come the great believers, " who by a long and religious investigation, penetrate a more profound and abstruse light in the Scriptures, and are sensible of the mysterious and divine secret of our ecclesiastical polity."

Montaigne's admiration of those full and complete souls, which ascertain the bounds of human capacity and then proceed to work out all that is best within the appointed bounds, is genuine and ardent. But the average human creature,

occupying the middle region between the two ignorances, needs more to be reminded of his infirmities than to be exalted with vain flattery of his nature. The doctoral ignorance is "strong and generous", yielding nothing in honour and in courage to knowledge. The hastily-assumed knowledge of the middle region is really the shallowest self-conceit, true though it be that almost all opinions have in them a tincture of reason. And what a thing is this nature of man! Looking into himself Montaigne could credit all old-wives' fables of strange monstrosity—and yet what is that which we name "monstrosity" but nature misunderstood?—for nowhere did he perceive so strange a monster as himself. A monster not twiformed but shaped from a thousand incoherent pieces. The longer he dwelt with himself the more his deformity astonished him, the less he could comprehend so anomalous a creature. To understand how a single thought, a single feeling arose within him was difficult, so dazzling was its iridescence; to understand his whole course of life was a hopeless task, so much it differed from itself. The only thing constant seemed to be inconstancy. "It looks as if there were a show of reason in forming a judgment of a man from the most general features of his life; but, considering the natural instability of our manners and opinions, it often seems to me that

even the best authors are wrong in obstinately endeavouring to form out of us any constant and solid contexture; they make choice of some general aspect, and according to that image they arrange and interpret all a man's actions; if they cannot bend these sufficiently, they dismiss them as proceeding from dissimulation . . . I can more hardly credit a man's constancy than any other thing, and I credit nothing more readily than his inconstancy. He that would judge a man in detail, separating him bit by bit, would oftener light upon a true word." * Our accustomed motion is to follow the inclinations of our appetite, to left, to right, up hill, down dale, as the wind of occasion blows us. As for Montaigne himself, he had only added to the other instabilities of human nature the agitation and trouble of contemplating his own instability. "If I speak variously of myself, it is because I consider myself variously; all contrarieties are found in me, at this turn or that, in this way or another; bashful, insolent; chaste, luxurious; prating, taciturn; laborious, delicate; ingenious, dull; fretful, debonair; lying, truthful; knowing, ignorant; and liberal, and avaricious, and prodigal." The way of wisdom should be a constant way; and how shall one who has not in the main

* *Essays*, II, 1.

directed his course to a certain end, how shall he dispose his particular actions? But we, human creatures, resemble that animal which takes its colour from whatever leaf or stone that is on which it rests.

The infirmity of human intellect is only part of a nature which is all infirmity. We inhabit the region of perturbations, to which the peasant has not yet climbed and which the philosopher has transcended, and all we can hope for at best is to moderate those perturbations. Our affections carry themselves away beyond our nature and our reach. This is of all errors the most common, if indeed it be an error and not rather a cunning provision of Nature herself, which sacrifices the individual in order that her work may be accomplished, and lures us forever beyond ourselves by delusive imaginations. If the soul should miss its true objects, it must find objects that are false on which to expend its passions; if these again should fail, the soul turns inward and discharges its violence upon itself. It would rather cheat itself by creating something wholly fantastic on which to wreak its rage or its love than be defrauded of some outlet for its desire. And even if its passions are directed aright, it will convert good to evil by their excess. "We may lay hold upon virtue so that it will become vicious, if we clasp it with too rude and violent

an embrace." We taste nothing pure; our virtue is never without some alloy of evil, our vice is seldom without some touch of goodness. We are one thing to-day, and to-morrow its opposite.

So ever and anon, if not continuously, throughout the *Essays* proceeds Montaigne's indictment of humanity. What is the final issue? Should it not be a misanthropy like that of Swift? Or, if not this, some melancholy kind of pessimism? It is neither of these with Montaigne, for at heart he loves life and would loyally enjoy his being. He makes a return upon himself, and accepts the conditions of humanity, accepts such limitations and infirmities as are inevitable, and endeavours to cultivate his garden, even as it is. "Greatness of soul consists not so much in mounting and in pressing forward as in knowing how to range and circumscribe one's self; it takes for great everything that is enough, and shows its stature by preferring moderate to eminent things. There is nothing so beautiful and so legitimate as well and duly to play the man; nor science so arduous as well and naturally to know how to live this life of ours; and of our maladies the most wild and barbarous is to despise our being. . . . For my part then, I love life and cultivate it, such as it has pleased God to bestow it upon us." In this present, created for us by God, he goes on, there is

nothing unworthy of our concern; we stand accountable for it even to a hair.

"Well and duly to play the man." Let the heroes of our race, heroes of the life of thought like Socrates, heroes of the life of action like Epaminondas, play the man in their own great way. They are accountable, even to a hair, for their heroisms. As for us of the middle region, our heroism lies in moderation, in accepting our place, and finding our happiness in its labours, its pleasures, and its repose. This, and this alone, is the meaning of the old precept to live according to Nature. And, indeed, Nature is "a gentle guide, but not more gentle than prudent and just". The infinite prudence of Nature—on this, one of her most admirable virtues, Montaigne waxes eloquent. As she has given us feet to walk with, so she has given us enough of her prudence to conduct us through life; a prudence not so ingenious or pompous as that professed by the crowd of contending philosophers, but which achieves what they only talk of, a prudence that is "facile, quiet, and salutary". And of a life so guided the ultimate attainment should be a radiant calm: "The soul estimates how much it owes to God to have repose of conscience and freedom from intestine passions; to have the body in its natural disposition, orderly and adequately enjoying those soft and gratifying functions, with

which He by his grace is pleased to compensate the sufferings wherewith his justice in its turn chastises us; the soul considers of how great worth it is to be stationed at such a point that, which way soever it turns the eye, the heavens are calm around it; no desire, no fear or doubt to trouble the air; no difficulty, past, present, future, over which its imagination may not pass without offence." * Montaigne was no religious mystic. He embraced, he says, of philosophical opinions those which are the most solid—that is to say, the most human, the most our own. But a religious mystic could hardly shadow forth in words a peace more pure or more luminous than this.

Self-sacrifice, self-surrender may be the means to some great end; it may be endured for some joy that is set before it; but self-sacrifice cannot itself be our end. "Loyally to enjoy our being" is Montaigne's expression, as it were, for his private edification; but to challenge opponents he needs a less elevated and a more irritating word, one that may serve as a lash to the dulness of the average understanding, and he chooses the word "pleasure". In virtue itself the final aim of all our efforts is this decried thing, pleasure; this, and nothing else. "It pleases me to batter men's

* *Essays*, III, 13

ears with the word, and if it has acquired the significance of some supreme delight and excessive contentment, this is more owing to the help of virtue than to any other help." The voluptuousness of virtue, in that it is more gay, more sinewy, more robust, more virile than any other, is only the "more seriously voluptuous". We ought rather to name virtue, Montaigne thinks, a more gracious, sweet, and natural pleasure than name it, as we are accustomed to do, from its quality of manly vigour. Other pleasures are troubled with crosses and inconveniences, are momentary, are thin and watery, or entail a dull weight of satiety. Virtue, it is true, is attained through trials and difficulties, but these in a peculiar degree "ennoble, sharpen, and heighten the divine and perfect pleasure which it procures us. He who would weigh the cost against the fruit is very unworthy of entering into intimacy with it." Its pursuit, however arduous, is itself a joy, and, in truth, at best we are ever in pursuit. Our whole life can be no more than an apprenticeship to the ideal.

Montaigne will not allow the name of virtue to those inclinations towards goodness which are born with us. One who is naturally sweet-tempered may not resent an injury, and such a disposition is a thing of rare beauty. But he who is stung to the quick and masters the passion of vengeance has attained to something higher, has

attained to virtue. It requires "a rough and thorny way", difficulties to wrestle with, either external to the soul, the tests placed in our way by fortune, or internal, arising from our disorderly appetites and the defects of character. We are reminded of the distinction made by Wordsworth in his *Ode to Duty* between those who do the work of duty and know it not, whose security can yet never be absolute, and those who, checked and reproved by the "stern daughter of the voice of God", have at length made her law their own. The highest state of all, and that of the rarest attainment, is when virtue has become, as it were, nature—a second nature, with all its inevitableness and all its sweet facility. In the opening of the essay, *Of Cruelty*, Montaigne points to Socrates and to the younger Cato as examples of virtue which has climbed to the height where it is possession rather than pursuit, where effort is lost in absolute light and absolute joy, a light that is unerring, and a joy that is its own security. As for himself, returning from his hymn in honour of Greek and Roman virtue to plain prose he assures us that he has not given good proofs even of the lower and laborious excellence: "I have made no great effort to curb the vices by which I have been importuned; my virtue is a virtue, or rather an innocence, accidental and fortuitous; had I been born of a more irregular

complexion, I fear it would have gone miserably ill with me; for I have hardly ever tried to confirm my soul against the press of passions." If he was exempt from many vices, this was rather his happy fortune, he says, than the result of reason. He came of a race distingushed for integrity, he was brought up by an admirable father, and naturally held most vices in detestation.

It would not profit us much to find a label which might be affixed to Montaigne as a moralist. If we should name him a Stoic of the more gracious and amiable type we should have to remind ourselves that he has close affinities with the sect of Epicurus, "the opinions and precepts of which in firmness and rigour yield nothing to the Stoic School". We should in the end have to describe him as an eclectic, whose morals, humane and yet, in a true sense, severe, were those of the antique world, touched—not penetrated—by a beam of Christian light. In the honour and affection with which he regarded the body he held that he was only developing into its wider meanings a truth which is implied in the faith of Christianity; yet it may be conjectured that St. Paul would hardly have recognised in Montaigne a fellow disciple. His feeling has in reality no direct relation with any form of religious belief, though it determined some of Montaigne's ecclesiastical preferences; it is founded upon his

observations in the natural history of the genus *homo* and of the specimen of that genus which he had most persistently studied. There is nothing in us, he maintains, wholly incorporeal and nothing wholly corporeal. It will serve no good purpose to break ourselves up into fragments. He hated "that inhuman wisdom which would make us hostile to the culture of the body or scornful of it". Instead of sequestering, each from the other, the two parts of our nature, we should rather closely couple them or, as far as may be, reunite them: "We must command the soul not to withdraw and entertain itself apart, to despise and abandon the body (neither can she do it but by some counterfeited apish trick), but to re-ally herself with it, to embrace it, to cherish it, to assist, to control it, to counsel it, to bring it back when it goes astray; in a word, to espouse and be a husband to it, so that the result of their operations may not appear to be diverse and contrary, but concurring and uniform." As Montaigne advanced in years he professed himself more deliberately Anacreontic, and thought it wise to defend himself now against temperance, as he had formerly defended himself against pleasure. Old age grows dull and besotted with prudence, but he would have it gay, as far as good sense permits. He would seize the least occasions of pleasure, he, who was so often racked with pain. Why

should he not lash a top if it amused him? "Plato ordains that old men should be present at the exercises, dances, and sports of young people, that they may rejoice by proxy in the suppleness and beauty of body which are no longer theirs, and call back to mind the grace and comeliness of that flourishing age." * Like another sage, Montaigne had eagerly frequented the Doctors, and heard great argument about it and about:

"but evermore
Came out by the same Door as in I went."

Now there were moods when he would allege to himself that it were well to divorce old barren Reason from his bed, and take the daughter of the vine to spouse. And he was well aware, as was his fellow sage of Persia, that there is something of pathos, something sadly self-conscious in such expedients of old age, which is glad because it is melancholy. A young man who pretends to a taste in sauces should be whipped; as sexagenarian years approach, let us begin to learn the serious value of a sauce—it is not too voluptuous an indulgence of our senility; we must wheedle ourselves a little—and how little it is, after all, that we can wheedle ourselves! Neither

* *Essays*, III, 5.

the great masters of warfare nor the great philosophers despised an exquisite dinner, and the little philosopher of the tower—essentially simple in all his ways—plays with the thought of three feasts of his earlier manhood, which fortune had made of sovereign sweetness to him, and which his reason bids his recollection cherish as memorable gains of his life. But better than these, better than all, except friendship and wisdom, is health, which in its full, continuous possession can no more be had. "I receive health with open arms, free, full, and entire; and by so much the more whet my appetite to enjoy it, by how much it is at present less ordinary and more rare; so far I am from troubling its repose and sweetness with the bitterness of a new and constrained manner of living." Let those who would impose laws against the sane satisfactions of the body forswear breathing; let them refuse the light of the sun. There is season and a time to every purpose under the heaven; a time, says Solomon, to embrace—and shall we then occupy our thoughts with the quadrature of the circle?—and a time to refrain from embracing: "When I dance, I dance; when I sleep, I sleep; nay, when I walk in the solitude of some fair orchard, if my thoughts for some part of the time are taken up with external occurrences, during some other part of the time I call them back again to my walk,

to the orchard, to the sweetness of that solitude, and to myself."

It is not surprising that Montaigne should have seen little wisdom in the practices of ascetic discipline. Discipline there is in the various efforts which are needful in order that we may learn loyally to enjoy our being. To attain the higher ignorance requires an *askesis* of the intellect. To attain virtue is impossible without trial, difficulty, and danger. Moderation is less easy to maintain than abstinence. When the natural discipline of life has been put to use and found inadequate, we may consider the uses of self-inflicted hardships. There is a place, Montaigne tells us, where the sun is abominated and darkness adored; for his own part, he saw best under a clear sky and was thankful to the Giver of Light. Shall we consider our own fantastic rules as superior to the laws of Nature and of God? Or is God, indeed, a cruel and capricious deity, who delights in human sacrifice? "Behold, lord," said the Mexicans to Cortez, "here are five slaves: if thou art a fierce god that feedeth upon flesh and blood, devour them, and we will bring thee more; if thou art an affable god, behold here incense and feathers; if thou art a man, take these fowls and these fruits that we have brought thee." And shall we look upon our God as a more furious Cortez? Those devotees who by their ascetic

practices hope to dissociate the soul from the body, save in rare examples of extraordinary spirits, would fain cease to be men. "It is folly," pronounces Montaigne; "instead of transforming themselves into angels they transform themselves into beasts; instead of elevating they degrade themselves. These transcendental humours affright me, like high and inaccessible places." He chose rather to associate his soul gratefully with all the sane and natural joys of the body. "Between ourselves," he whispers in his reader's ear, "there are two things which I have always seen to be of singular accord—supercelestial opinions and subterranean manners." By dying, after a fashion, while we are still alive, it is by no means difficult to avoid the trouble of living well.

The fact that we are "wonderfully corporeal" and that it is the part of wisdom, as he believes, to keep the soul and body harmoniously together, predisposed Montaigne against those forms of religion which do not appeal to the senses and the imagination as well as to what is purely spiritual in man. He judged the Reformed Faith as one who stood wholly apart from it, and who knew not to what the zeal of its followers could be ascribed except to the spirit of faction and division: "Let those who, of these late years, would erect for us an exercise of religion so contemplative and immaterial not wonder if some are

found who think that it would have escaped and slipped through their fingers were it not maintained among us as a mark, a title, and an instrument of separation and faction rather than for its own sake." Were Montaigne not a Christian and a Catholic, he would have chosen, he says, to be a worshipper of the sun; its grandeur and beauty address themselves to the senses, and it is so remote from us that under a visible image we might still adore it as the Unknown God. When Numa attempted to direct the devotion of the Roman people to a purely spiritual religion he undertook a hopeless and useless task, the human mind cannot maintain itself as it wanders in "the infinite of inform thoughts." The Divine majesty for our sakes permitted itself in some sort to be circumscribed in corporal limits: "His supernatural and celestial sacraments have signs of our terrestrial condition; the adoration of God expresses itself through sensible offices and words; for man it is who believes and who prays." Montaigne could not but be of the opinion that the sight of the crucifix and of the paintings of a suffering Saviour, the ornaments of churches, the ceremonious gestures of the celebrant, the voices of singers attuned to devout thought and feeling, the stir of all the senses, infused into the souls of the pious crowd a warmth of religious passion which had its excellent uses. Sensitive himself

to all sweet odours, which clung to his person in a peculiar degree, he approved the use of incense and perfumes in churches—though simple and natural odours pleased him best—as ancient and almost universal means of cheer and refreshment which awaken and purify the senses and render us more apt for contemplation. He could not hear without emotion an ode of Horace or Catullus sung by fair, young lips; the voice was for him, as an old philosopher had called it, "the flower of beauty". And why should not all beauty subserve the devout spirit? What soul of man is there so stubborn, he asks, that will not be touched with some reverence in considering the sombre vastness of our churches, the variety of ornaments and order of our ceremonies, in hearing the religious tones of our organs, and the harmony, so tempered and so devout, of voices. "Even those who enter in a scoffing spirit feel a certain shiver run through their hearts, and a certain awe which bids them hold their opinion in distrust." *

Montaigne had another ground of hostility to the Reformed Faith beside the fact that it commended to men what he regarded as an "incorporeal" religion; it seemed to him to invite minds that were ill-qualified for such an enterprise to become judges of Divine truth. He held that if such

* *Essays*, II, 12.

truth is to be received, it must be received upon authority; we have no faculties for speculation in things above our modest sphere. In morals, which really interested him and on which he knew that the conduct of life depends, Montaigne would by no means renounce his rights of private judgment. As for the Christian Faith, however much he reverenced it, however he may have enjoyed the artistry of defending it by an ingenious dialectic, it did not penetrate and possess his nature; he found no great difficulty—to use a rude expression—in kicking it upstairs, or—to use a respectful expression—in placing it high above the meddling of the human intellect; Divine doctrine, "as queen and regent of the rest", is to keep her queenly state apart, there to be sovereign and not suffragan or subsidiary. It discomposed Montaigne to see the crowd bandy to and fro in rash debate the Unknown God. Most men are Christians and Catholics, as one born in Périgord is a Périgourdin; and this at least was better than to make the mysteries of our religion the sport and recreation of eager disputants. That the *Psalms* of David should be made popular in French verse, and sung by a 'prentice in his shop among his frivolous thoughts, and as an exercise of his lungs, seemed to Montaigne more impious than pious. The *Bible*, the holy book of mysteries, was not a book to be tumbled up and down

a hall or a kitchen. It should be reverently approached with a *Sursum corda* as a preface. He smiled at the notion that a translation of its words would make it intelligible to the vulgar reader; rather, he feared, by understanding a fragment such a reader would more profoundly misconceive the purport of the whole. That women and children should undertake to teach old and experienced men ecclesiastical polity was indeed grotesque. As to himself, in his *Essays* he proposed merely human fantasies, fantasies merely his own, as children present their exercises and essays, not to instruct but to be instructed.

In all that Montaigne says there is an air of devoutness, and for himself it was more than an air or an attitude. He wrote sincerely; he was not a sceptic grinning behind a mask; but his form of piety was hardly consistent with his general principles. If I contradict myself, he might have replied, well, then, I contradict myself; but that is hardly a satisfactory answer for any one except the speaker. While he would keep the body and soul harmoniously together as mutually helpful companions, he would divide the soul itself into two separate compartments—the compartment of reason and the compartment of faith. Each was a genuine portion of the entire man, and he would have been a different human being if either had been annihilated. But a faith which

is held, as it were, in reserve, which does not permeate the whole body of beliefs, which does not penetrate the whole character, is a singularly artificial product. Montaigne the moralist walks on the substantial earth, and Plutarch and Seneca are companions good enough for all his needs; or he rests his head, like a peasant or a philosopher, on Mother Earth, only interposing as a soft, sane, and easy pillow the ignorance and incuriosity which suit a well-ordered head; his faith floats aloft in a balloon attached to the ground by a sure but slender cord; by and by he enters the car of his balloon, reason suffers for a moment from vertigo, and is presently asphyxiated as Montaigne, the believer, approaches the peace of the Divine mysteries of religion. The division of his own nature made by the ascetic who sunders the soul from the body is less destructive of unity than such a division as this—a division of the soul itself.

How independent was the pagan philosopher, who constituted three-fourths of Montaigne, from the Christian, who sailed in the car of the balloon, may be seen from a glance at his thoughts on repentance, and his thoughts on death. With respect to the sense of sin and the sorrow for sin Montaigne's book may deserve the title given to it by Cardinal Du Perron—the breviary of *honnêtes gens;* it is not the breviary of Chris-

tians. "Be pleased to excuse what I often say," Montaigne writes, "that I rarely repent, and that my conscience is satisfied with itself, not as the conscience of an angel, or of a horse, but as the conscience of a man." * The Christian enters swiftly and adds the qualification that he speaks—and here Montaigne avows his sincerity—in submission to the accepted and legitimate beliefs on this subject. That is to say, the pagan philosopher lifts his cap in all reverence to the Cross, replaces it, and moves forward. Looking back over his past life, he found that on the whole it had been lived in conformity with Nature; he had not flown high, but he had walked in an orderly fashion; he saw, amid all its diversity, a certain unity in his life—"almost from my birth it has been one; the same inclination, the same route, the same force." He found it very hard to imagine any sudden change of heart or life. He could conceive a desire for a complete alteration or reformation of his being, but this was no more repentance, he says, than if he were dissatisfied because he was not an angel or Cato. On the whole he could do no better than he had done; in the same circumstances he would again act as he had acted; it may be that he was stained throughout with a universal tincture, but there

* *Essays*, III, 2.

were no definite spots; if he were to repent at all, it must be not a particular, but a universal repentance, and he was well pleased to be a man. True, he had now and again erred seriously, but this was not through lack of prudent deliberation; it was rather through want of good luck; the events could not have been other than they were; they belonged to the large course of the universe, to the entire enchainment of Stoical causes. Certainly the voice that speaks to us is not the voice of St. Augustine, nor the voice of St. Paul. Montaigne never could have known Pascal's tears of joy, for he had never known the tears of anguish. But he is one of the tribe of *honnêtes gens*, and the breviary is a book of good faith. He writes with admirable sincerity, and will not budge an inch from the facts of his consciousness to construct a romance of religious experience.

The thought of death was constantly with Montaigne from his early years. In the midst of his youthful pleasures it haunted him as a skeleton at the banquet of life. He was not melancholy by temperament, but he was meditative and he held hard by realities; death was of all things the most certain; life appeared to him but as "a flash in the infinite course of an eternal night". The day of death was for him "the master day"; then no counterfeiting would avail; then we must speak out plain—"*il fault parler françois*". He

was curious to learn how this man and that confronted it; perhaps they did not know that they were dying; perhaps they were of the common opinion that so great a revolution of Nature could not come to pass without a solemn consultation of the stars; and yet, after all, each of us is but one, and our petty interests do not disturb the heavens. And how little we can prepare ourselves for the great act; we cannot rehearse that scene even once; we are all apprentices when we come to die. Yet how can we live happily for an hour unless we have learnt a contempt of death? The remedy of the vulgar crowd is simply not to think of it; but from what embruted stupidity, inquires Montaigne, can such gross blindness be derived? No—we should keep death forever in view; we should always be booted for the journey and ready to depart; we should at once live and detach ourselves from life. "Let death find me planting my cabbages, unconcerned by its coming, and still less concerned for my unfinished garden." In his premeditations upon death Montaigne fortified his spirit with every consideration except those which are the hope and joy of a Christian. We may find it, he thought, less formidable than it appears in anticipation; at all events it can happen only once, and nothing that happens only once can be a serious grievance; death is part of a universal order; if we have lived a day, we have

seen all and should be ready to depart. These, he tells us, are the good lessons of our mother Nature. For a moment, indeed, he speaks of death as the entrance to another life, and he speaks elsewhere of the belief of the mortality of the soul as an unsocial belief—one which isolates us from the hope of companionship with those we love. But he is not penetrated and possessed by the Christian thought that the sting of death has been taken away forever, that life has become the victor. In the essay on *A Custom of the Isle of Cea* he regards death as the means of escape from ills of this world, and studies the conditions under which suicide becomes legitimate. His ideal of the conduct of life, as death makes its approaches, was to look at death steadily, without astonishment, if possible without concern, and to carry on freely the action and processes of life up to the final moment, to live as long as possible and as far as possible into the depth of the shadow of death.

As Montaigne advanced in years his mood changed. The thought of death still followed him. Seldom on his travels did he come to an inn without thinking whether or not he could there die at his ease. Perhaps death could be made more than easy, perhaps it could be made even voluptuous; at least he might aspire to something between the death of a wise man and

that of a fool. An emperor should die standing, and why should not every gallant man? But the sentence seemed to him to be touched with exaggeration, and he struck it out. After all, it is best, he thought, to die simply and modestly, to have done with premeditations of death, to have done with the consolations of philosophy, and to let that unimportant quarter of an hour come in its own way and come when it will. In his earlier days he had thought of the peasant's indifference to dying until it is actually at hand, and he decided that it was better to play the philosopher. Now he would revert towards the peasant. He believed that as death is troubled by the care of life, so life is troubled by the care of death. The precept of true philosophy is not *Memento mori*, but Remember to live. Have we known how to live steadfastly and tranquilly, then we shall know how to die in like manner. "If you know not how to die, never trouble yourself; Nature will in a moment fully and sufficiently instruct you; she will exactly do that business for you; take you no care for it." This may be excellent counsel for *honnêtes gens;* death will bandage our eyes, and somehow we shall creep past; meanwhile let us live sanely and well. But such a death as Montaigne imagines is untouched by any ray of light from the great Christian morning.

And yet the longest and most elaborate of his

essays, in itself almost a volume, the *Apology for Raimond de Sebonde*, is a defence of the Christian Faith. Nor did Montaigne neglect the practices of the Catholic Church. In his travels it was his custom on arriving at a town, when circumstances made it possible, to be present at the mass. He thought that the Lord's prayer cannot be too frequently in use; he had great veneration for the sign of the Cross, and observed it even on slight occasions if to do so fell in with the custom. "There is nothing so easy, so sweet, and so favourable," he writes, "as the Divine Law; she invites us to herself, faulty and detestable as we are; extends her arms to us and receives us in her bosom, foul and polluted as we are, and as we needs must be in the days to come." He would not limit the Divine power in Nature by the denial of miracles. He thought at one time, indeed, to decrassify his religious practice by eliminating certain rules and observances that were distasteful to him; but afterwards he recognised that entire submission of self-will was required and ought to be accorded. At the shrine of Our Lady at Loreto he placed four figures wrought in silver—those of the Virgin, of his wife, of his daughter, and of himself. He died with hands devoutly clasped as the priest was in the act of elevating the Host.

The *Essays* are a book of good faith, and Mon-

taigne's apology for revealed religion is not a mere piece of artifice. It would not be unfair, however, to call its dialectic a work of art. He dismisses Sebonde's "quintessence drawn from St. Thomas Aquinas" with the remark that it is as creditable a performance as other like defences of revelation which invoke the aid of human reason; it is laudable to accommodate, as far as we can, our natural capacities to the Divine truth; it is desirable to accompany our faith with the reason which we possess, poor though that reason may be; such arguments as those of the old Professor at Toulouse may in some degree help to qualify us for receiving the grace of faith. For his own part, Montaigne chooses to adopt a more ingenious and, he hopes, a more effective line of defence; he will confound man's understanding before the voice of God; he will build a rampart for the city of God from the ruined fragments of human reason; he will make scepticism subserve belief. Or, to adopt his own metaphor, he will resort to the last and most hazardous, yet the surest trick of fence; he will make a desperate thrust which, in disarming the adversary, will force the challenger to drop his own weapon—a trick of fence to be practiced only in the last extremity. The finest use of human reason, according to the paradox of Montaigne, is to deprive reason—at least in this province—of its

uses. And we cannot but perceive that the obedient son of the Church enjoys above all things the dexterity of his feat; there is something of high humour in turning the edge of human judgment against its master; one who is convinced will surely cry with Dumain, of Navarre, "Proceeded well, to stop all good proceeding!" Montaigne, we may conjecture, had never more of human pride than in his desperate polemic against the pride of humanity.

His zeal as an artist in dialectic in some degree defeats itself. He abandons his accustomed spirit of moderation and for once becomes extravagant; and his extravagance does injury to his art. If he had confined his attack on human reason to reason as employed in the spheres of theology and of metaphysics his case would have been stronger; but, with an eagerness characteristic of Montaigne when thoroughly roused, he will have all or nothing. His own convictions within the area of human life and moral prudence were many and unhesitating; he was no Pyrrhonist here, and he had great confidence in his judgment. The entire collection of the *Essays* is a refutation of many pages of this, the central piece; and it must be confessed that many pages are no better than a chaos of ill-digested facts, or of fictions assumed to be facts for the purpose of argument. The general result of his discussion is not to confirm

revealed religion, but to confirm the spirit of acquiescence in whatever creed we happen to be born and brought up. A Mohammedan could apply all the pleadings of the *Apology for Raimond de Sebonde* to justify his faith in Mohammed; a Buddhist could apply them to justify his faith in Buddha. Christianity might well look with suspicion upon its self-constituted champion.

Having eloquently set forth the insignificance of the place occupied by man in the vast universe, man whose conditions are governed by the stars, and who except through obedience can have no commerce with the heavens, Montaigne proceeds to demonstrate that he has no real advantage over the brutes that perish, the most ugly and abject of whom he most nearly resembles. It is true that he is cursed with imagination more than they, and has created for himself unnatural desires and a swarm of vices unknown to them. The remorseless critic strips man to the shirt and discovers him to be but a poor, bare, forked animal. As for his knowledge, does it exempt him from evils? Or rather is not the opinion of wisdom his special plague? "I have seen in my time a hundred artisans, a hundred labourers wiser and happier than the rectors of the University. . . . A thousand poor simple women (*mille femmelettes*) have lived in a village a life more equable, more sweet, more constant than that of Cicero,"

A confession of our ignorance, a habit of simplicity and submission—these are in truth our proper virtues, and those which render us apt receivers of divine knowledge. There follows Montaigne's impressive record of the contrarieties and contradictions of learned opinion on all the highest subjects of human speculation—an endless jangle of philosophic brains. Insensate man! he who cannot fashion one flesh-worm and who will fashion gods by the dozen! Let him climb to the summit of Mount Cenis, he will be no nearer heaven than if he were at the bottom of the sea. With an admirable irony, which was enjoyed by Bossuet and remembered by Pope, Montaigne's goose enters on the scene to expound a goose's philosophy of Nature—there is nothing which the vault of heaven regards so favourably as a goose; she is the darling of Nature; man is her provider, her host, her servitor. But it is not only of things in the heavens that we are ignorant; we know nothing of the human soul, and little indeed—witness the myriad errors of physicians—of the human body. Such genuine knowledge as we may possess of these comes to us, as it were, by accident. Most of what we style knowledge is but opinion, growing and withering and falling away, and forever replaced by new opinion as transitory. Even the senses themselves are weak and uncertain, subject to

illusion, and imposing their illusions upon the understanding. We need some "judicatory instrument" by which to verify the declarations of our several faculties, which instrument would itself need to be verified, and so we should enter on a process which runs into the infinite. It is God alone who can save us from ourselves and bring us to the resting-place of His truth.

Such reduced to miniature proportions is Montaigne's apology for revealed religion. His temper of suspended judgment made belief difficult and disbelief no less difficult. At one time he dismissed as fables the tales of witchcraft, ghosts, prognostications, and the like. Afterwards he thought it more intellectually prudent to suspend his judgment and consider in each case the evidence for alleged facts. He was not able to reject exact testimony even for a modern miracle. But, being slow to move, he inclined a little towards the solid and the probable. He would not be threatened or cuffed into credulity, even though it was orthodox. "How much more natural and more probable it seems to me," he says, "that two men should lie than that one man in twelve hours should pass, even with the wind, from the Orient to the Occident; how much more natural, that our understanding should be borne away from its place by the volubility of our disordered mind than that one of us should be carried, flesh

and bones as we are, by a strange spirit up the shaft of a chimney." But to accept all the truths of divine revelation was an escape to harbour from the troubled waves of human opinion; and to observe dutifully all the practices of the Church was an easy burden, because it was traditional and customary, and was at the same time the submission proper for a frail and erring will to the divine ecclesiastical polity.

Perhaps his faith wavered; perhaps he could not really check the advance of his questioning spirit at the point which seemed most convenient. The higher souls alone, he thought, know an assured belief. He at least, imperfect believer as he was, had provided, by his ingenious artistry, a defence of the faith, unconceived by them. He could imagine their happier state, and he would in his outward conduct conform to all the duties which such a state implies. Was he a sceptic? Perhaps so, at times, in the back-shop of his mind. But he was also a Périgourdin, a Christian, a Catholic, a conservative, and as such he would behave. It was as if the tower of Montaigne were an allegory of the fabric of his soul. Below was the chapel with its altar, where the mass might be devoutly celebrated. Up aloft was the bell which at the appointed hour rang its *Ave Maria*. Below was the region of ceremonial practice. Above was the region of spiritual faith,

but the place was not quite habitable. Between the two was the library, where Montaigne spent most of his days, and most of the hours of each day. It was the region of moral prudence. In the library he could think his own thoughts, or gaze at its beams and joists and ponder the sentences of a philosopher's creed; here he could be wise with a human wisdom, and Seneca and Plutarch—not the fathers of the Church—were his companions.

CHAPTER X

MONTAIGNE ON HIS TRAVELS

THE volume of Montaigne's *Essays*, a thick octavo consisting of two books, was published by Simon Millanges at Bordeaux in 1580. When, eight years later, the Third Book was added, the earlier books were augmented by a large mass of insertions, some of which impair the original design, if we may speak of a design, of certain of the essays. The last essay of the Second Book, written shortly before the date of publication, that on the *Resemblance of Children to Fathers* tells of his having suffered during some eighteen months from the painful malady—"nephritic colic"—which he believed he had inherited from Pierre Eyquem, though it had not declared itself until about his forty-fifth year. He had inherited also a profound distrust of the treatment of sixteenth-century physicians and a strong distaste for their nostrums. But he hoped for some benefit from such natural waters, taken internally and used as baths, as were supposed to be suitable to the ailment which afflicted him. Change of scene and variety of company would at least help to distract from himself one whose curiosity was

boundless. There was always a certain inevitable pang in leaving home, in parting from his wife and daughter, in quitting his chair in the library. But home had also its vexations from which it was pleasant for a time to escape; and the political condition of France was full of troubles which Montaigne would gladly forget. He had no heirs for whom it was necessary to save; he might indulge himself in his desire to see something of the world; and he knew that the domestic economy of the château was safe under the prudent conduct of his wife. Conjugal friendship might even be increased by a period of absence; it is a poor kind of affection which requires perpetual neighbourhood. He could ride for many hours without fatigue. If it rained, he enjoyed the rain, and though in some things he was fastidious, he could dabble in the dirt like a duck. All skies were alike to him. And when he thought of death as possible, he added the thought that all places—the road, the tow-boat, the inn—are good enough to die in. He loved variety, diversity, the observation of strange manners and customs. Travel was a school of education. If he was old, he was not too old to learn, and old age is the time when we have a right to please ourselves. Yes—he would travel, and he would not bind himself strictly to a route or a date; he would travel through country and town as he travelled

through books—wherever the inclination took him.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, about one hundred and eighty years after the death of Montaigne, Canon Prunis was engaged in collecting materials for a history of Périgord. He visited the château of Montaigne, then in the possession of the Count de Segur, a descendant of the Essayist's daughter. They showed him an old coffer containing papers which had long since been laid aside. He rummaged and discovered among these papers the manuscript journal of *The Travels of Montaigne*, a volume in folio of two hundred and seventy-eight pages. The opening pages were wanting; somewhat over a third of the manuscript was in the handwriting of a servant who acted as Montaigne's secretary and who wrote at his master's dictation, but in the third person; the remainder was in the master's autograph; the greater portion was in French—showing, as do the *Essays*, the Gasconisms of Montaigne. While at the Baths of Lucca he determined to continue his journal in Italian—such Italian as he was able to write; and just before the close he again returned to his native tongue. The manuscript was deposited in the King's Library, and was open to inspection; it was carefully examined by the librarian, M. Capperonnier, and by others, and was pronounced to be genuine. In

1774 it was published, in quarto and in a smaller form, at Rome and Paris, under the editorship of an industrious man of letters, Meusnier de Querlon. It has been in our own day republished as an important document for the knowledge of Italy in the sixteenth century, by Professor Alessandro D'Ancona, who has added a large body of scholarly annotations. The original manuscript has unhappily disappeared. It was evidently written with no view to publication; the Italian portion may have been composed not only as a record of travel but as an exercise in the language; the portion in French is sometimes a series of jottings ill-connected and set down with no attempt at literary grace; the details of Montaigne's state of health are such as could have interested no one but himself. Many of these entries of an invalid have been discreetly omitted by the latest English translator.

On June 22, 1580, Montaigne bade farewell to his wife and daughter, who, as it proved, were not to see him again until the close of November in the following year. He journeyed to Paris and thence to the camp outside La Fère, where the royal army, under Marshal Matignon, was conducting a siege. According to the report of a contemporary, which may be more than a legend, a presentation copy of the *Essays* was graciously received by King Henri III., who de-

clared that it pleased him much. "Sire," responded Montaigne, "it follows then that I am pleasing to your Majesty, since my book is pleasing, for it contains nothing but a discourse concerning my life and my actions." Having followed to Soissons, amid lamenting crowds, the body of Philibert de Gramont, *la belle Corisande's* husband, who had lost an arm in the siege and had died of the wound, Montaigne set forth on his travels. He was accompanied by his young brother Bertrand, Lord of Mattecoulon, the Seigneur de Cazalis, probably a kinsman by marriage, and the Seigneur du Hautoi, a gentleman of Lorraine. At Beaumont the party was joined by the Seigneur d'Estissac, doubtless a son of the lady to whom the eighth essay of the Second Book is addressed. The young man was the bearer of letters of commendation from the King and the Queen Mother to the Duke of Este. The troop, riding on horseback, was followed by valets, lackeys, and muleteers.

The youngest member of the party could not have ridden with more of quicksilver in his nerves than Montaigne, who was not far from his fiftieth year, and who from time to time was subject to acute attacks of what he terms his "colic". He rode with an open mind, ready to enter into every pleasure, prepared to fall in with all the ways and manners of foreign places, disposed to think well

of humanity, though it might differ from what was familiar in Périgord or in Paris, full of an untiring intellectual curiosity. His feeling for external nature was not that of the nineteenth century, but he enjoyed a fair prospect more, and was horrified by a mountain less, than many of his contemporaries. His feeling for art, except for the literary art, had been little cultivated; he was not without a certain interest in sculpture, but the debased ingenuities of the declining Renaissance impressed him as much as the statues of Michael Angelo in the Medici Chapel, which he mentions with passing praise; concerning the great Italian painters he is almost silent; Titian and Tintoretto did not interest him at Venice, nor Raphael at Rome. He had an imaginative sense of the greatness of the ancient world, as it may be guessed at through some vast crumbling fragment or some disinterred relic; but he was not in any high degree skilled as an antiquary or archæologist. His proper game, as he might have called it, was man—man in his diversity of creeds, ceremonies, opinions, politics, civic and domestic arrangements, with all the devices which he has invented for the splendour, the comfort, and the convenience of life. Now Montaigne holds converse with some learned doctor on the theory of the sacraments, and now he inspects with interest a smoke-jack or a spit. Now he

dines with a cardinal or a grand duke, and studies the manners of the great; and he is just as well pleased when mine host of "The Grape" at Mülhausen, who has returned from presiding at the Town Council, pours out the wine for his guests, and discourses, unabashed and unpretentious, of his condition and way of living. The traveller had none of that "taciturn and incommunicable prudence" which is proper to the wayfarer in foreign parts who carries his native prejudices and ill manners with him, "defending himself from the contagion of an unknown air". He, a Frenchman to the core, was also a cosmopolitan, and chose rather to consort with strangers, from whom he could learn something new, than with his own countrymen who found their joy in grumbling at foreign manners and foreign fare. He had always, he said when at Brixen in Tyrol, distrusted the judgment of those who spoke of the conveniences and discomforts of foreign countries, not one of them knowing how to appreciate these except by his own accustomed rule and the usage of his village. Now, indeed, he was more than ever amazed at their stupidity, having heard tell of the passes of the Alps as full of difficulties, of the uncouth manners of the people, of inaccessible roads, wild places of abode, and insupportable air. All had been accepted by him as sufficiently agreeable; and if he had to choose a walk

for his little eight-years-old girl he would as soon take her along this road, he declared, as any path of his own garden.

He could not wander out of the way, for every way pleased him, and therefore was the right one. His companions might be impatient to arrive at a destination, but he was always content with the open road. "I truly believe," writes the secretary, "that if he had been alone with his own attendants, he would rather have gone to Cracow or towards Greece by land than have turned off towards Italy; but the pleasure which he took in visiting unknown countries—so delightful to him as to make him forget the infirmities of his years and health—he could not impart to any of his company, each of them longing for a place of rest. As for him, he was wont to say that after having passed a disturbed night, when at morning he reflected that a new city or a new country was to be seen, he rose with eager gladness. Never did I see him less weary or less disposed to complain of his sufferings; his spirit, both on the road and at his resting-places, was so much on the stretch to meet things and to take advantage of conversing with every stranger that I believe it beguiled him of his malady." Montaigne objected only to traversing the same road twice over. It was all to him, he said, like reading some very delightful story or admirable book and he feared

to arrive at the closing page. Such was his temper while his health allowed him to enjoy life; when illness obliged him to remain still and to suffer, he accepted the inevitable in the spirit of a philosopher: "It would be too great cowardice and weakness on my part," he writes at the Bagni della Villa, "if knowing that every day I am in danger of death in this manner, and that it must needs draw nearer every hour, I did not make every effort, before its arrival, to meet my end without anxiety whenever it may come. And in this respect it is wise to receive joyfully the good which it may please God to send us. There is no other medicine, no other rule or knowledge by which to avoid all those ills which assail man from every side and at every hour except the resolution to bear them humanly (*umanamente*), or else boldly and promptly to make an end of them."

It is not possible here to follow Montaigne through all the pleasant incidents of his wayfaring from Beaumont to the Baths of Plombières, through Switzerland and Tyrol and the Empire until on All Saints' Day he entered Verona. At Meaux he visits the so-called tomb of Ogier the Dane, and sees the garden and the curiosities of little old Juste Terrelle, long a sojourner in Eastern lands. At Epernay he converses with the learned Jesuit Maldonatus, who gives him a detailed account of the Baths of Spa.

The little house where Joan of Arc was born, decorated with paintings of her great deeds, interests him at Domremy. He turns aside from his road to Épinal in order to visit the nuns of Poussay, who exhibit the diversity of devotion, for they take no vow of virginity. At Plombières, where he stayed for ten days, he gained the friendship of the Seigneur d'Andelot, a distinguished military commander, and observed the singularity of his beard and eyebrows, in part blanched, and that in a moment, by the shock of his brother's tragic death. On his departure from the baths Montaigne left with his landlady, after the custom of the country, the escutcheon of his arms on wood, to be hung on the outer wall, an innocent piece of vanity which he indulged elsewhere, though unauthorised by custom. At Bussang he descended in linen garments into the silver mines, and, riding forward by and by through a mountain pass, peered up at the nests of the goshawks perched on inaccessible rocks. In Switzerland he learns with open mind that Protestantism is not quite an "immaterial" religion, nor necessarily a religion of faction, but may be part of a dignified order coexisting with freedom; yet he notices also the dangers arising from variations within the Protestant faith. He holds discourse with the learned men of Basel, and among them with the French jurisconsult

Hotman—a refugee since the St. Bartholomew, to whom he afterwards addressed a letter telling of his happy journeyings in Germany. In observing the manners and customs of each locality in the minutest details he is ever alert, and for the comeliness or the ill-favour of the women and the fashion of their attire he has himself an old goshawk's eye. And so he rides onward, starting each morning without breakfast, but provided with a hunch of dry bread, drinking little wine, or if more than a little only for courtesy, fastidious about nothing except cleanliness and the mattress and hangings of his bed, ready to converse on theology or the equally abstruse science of the gullet, and having but three regrets—that he had not brought with him a cook to study foreign methods, a German valet who might act as an interpreter, and a Murray or Baedeker of the sixteenth century which might have informed him better than a clergyman or a fool of a schoolmaster concerning the rare and remarkable sights of town and country. At Augsburg he and his friends had the happiness to be taken for barons and knights; and, greatness being thrust upon him by fortune, Baron Montaigne was pleased to widen the basis of his experience by accepting the consideration which accompanied his new dignity. He attended the services of the churches, Catholic and Lutheran, with impartial interest,

discoursed with a Protestant minister, witnessed a baptism, was present at the wedding of a wealthy young lady of the city—but the bride was ill-favoured, and not a good-looking woman among the guests atoned for her deficiencies—attended an exhibition of the art of fencing, and inspected that curious postern-gate of the city, the secret of which Queen Elizabeth of England had in vain sought to learn through an ambassador extraordinary. The pride of Baron Montaigne was humbled a little later, when, at Hala, the Archduke Fernand of Austria, to whom Monsieur de Montaigne desired to be presented, declined that honour, somewhat ruffling thereby the philosopher's temper.

To Italy Montaigne brought his abundant good humour, which was heightened rather than diminished by the devices of knavish innkeepers to entrap him, was little disturbed by their indifferent wines, and even survived noisome odours and the nocturnal sallies of vermin; at the worst he could avoid a bed and stretch himself in his clothes upon a table. He enjoyed the aspect of the country, the vine-festoons, the great gray oxen in the fields, the cultivation climbing up the steeps, the patches of pasture scattered among precipitous cliffs and splintered crags, the chestnut-woods, the olive-trees; yet he must needs lament a little when the mulberries were stripped of their

leaves and forced to put on an untimely appearance of winter. The dignity of the peasantry pleased him; even in asking alms they seemed hardly mendicants. More often they were busy at their country labours, or spinning, and this on a Sunday as well as on week-days, or with lutes in their hands they sang the pastoral songs of Ariosto. The beauty of the women he thought had been overrated, but afterwards in the upper ranks of society he saw many faces of dignity and sweetness. At Venice, at Florence, in Rome he observed the manners of those who made merchandise of their beauty and their wit, and, to satisfy his curiosity the better, would pay for a conversation in some splendid apartment, and presently be off to listen to an eloquent preacher in the church. To be at once exceedingly devout and extremely disregardful of morals was common enough in Italy of the Renaissance—we see the curious coalescence in Cellini's *Autobiography* —and Montaigne was amused by this concordant discordance as one of the varieties of human nature. There were no Lutheran or Calvinist ministers here, as in Switzerland and Germany, with whom he could discuss the theological mystery—source of a thousand disputes—involved in the word "*Hoc*",* but an interesting survival of

* "*Hoc est corpus meum.*"

ancient faith could be studied in the Jews. At Verona he visited their synagogue, and held long discourse with them concerning their ceremonies. In Rome he was again present at a synagogue, noting all that happened during the service, and in a private house he witnessed the solemn rite of circumcision. Nor did he fail to attend in the church of the Trinità the Lenten sermon of a recanted Rabbi for whom a congregation of sixty of the unconverted (for the Scripture saith, "Compel them to come in") was duly provided by the authorities. Thus Rome, in its Christian zeal, made amends for Calvary.

The palaces of the great nobles and the princes of the church, with their elaborately disposed gardens, were a delight to Montaigne. Pratolino, the splendid villa of the Duke of Florence, its long garden-alleys, and grottoes, and stone-benches, and the yet more sumptuous garden laid out near Tivoli for the pleasure of Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, especially impressed his imagination; he had an almost childish admiration for their fantastic ingenuities in water-works, which chirped like birds, performed upon the organ, put statues in motion, or surprised the unwary visitor with sudden jets or sprayings. The Cardinal Luigi d'Este, at the date of Montaigne's arrival in Italy, chose to sojourn in the stately house of a Paduan gentleman, partly to bathe his gouty

limbs in medicinal waters, but chiefly that he might enjoy the neighbourhood of the ladies of Venice, being a cardinal who if gouty was also gay. These visits to the marvels of ingenious luxury were diversions for Montaigne. With more earnest eyes he followed the traces of the history of his own nation on Italian soil. His father had fought in the wars of Italy; his friend Monluc had made himself glorious by his defence of Siena; Strozzi, a marshal of France, had also performed wonders to prevent its fall, and, though defeated, had struggled gallantly against superior forces. At Epernay Montaigne had sought out the undistinguished grave where Strozzi's body lay; at Florence he saw hanging from the church walls the banners which Strozzi had lost; at Siena he inspected the position of the city with a special view to understand more exactly the military operations; on his way from Pavia to Milan he turned aside from the road to visit the field where King Francis had been defeated and taken captive. His father's journal had probably made Montaigne already familiar with many forgotten incidents of war.

Wherever he went he seems to have observed the outward practices of the Christian Faith, as he found it in Italy. He saw before him a religion which, however abstruse its theological dogma might be, was, in its dealings with men and

women, an appeal to emotions, a religion half-supernatural, half-mundane, and always essentially popular. It was not removed from ordinary life, but entered into that life, and that life seemed to enter into, and become a part of religion. It was an affair which highly deserved the attention of a student of human nature. There were things in it, or encrusted upon it, which might look specially suitable to persons not overwise or even quite childish; but in most men and women there is something of the fool and a good deal of the child. When Montaigne was present at high mass in the Cathedral of Verona, the people in the choir chatted, with hats upon their heads, and carelessly turned their backs upon the altar; he was surprised and a little shocked, but still the great act was performed, and at the elevation of the Host, the noisiest gossips became worshippers. On Christmas Day, at St. Peter's, during the mass the Pope and Cardinals sat with covered heads and freely conversed with one another; before the cup touched any sacred lips its contents was tested lest the wine should have been dosed with poison; but still the mass was celebrated, and the Pope had taken his part. His Holiness had a natural son, whose mother was a servant, but if the Vicar of God was a man, he was none the less God's Vicar. When on Holy Thursday a canon of St. Peter's read aloud to

the assembled crowd the bull which excommunicated "an infinite variety of people", and when he came to the article which cut off those who had laid hands on any of the Church's estates, the Cardinals Medici and Caraffa burst into a fit of laughter; yet, all the same, the Pope, who, hard by, held the lighted torch and at the close flung it among the people, to scramble for its fragments, had done the stupendous deed, and all these evil ones were cast out. The "Penitencers", as Montaigne calls them, marched by torchlight through the streets in Lent, to the number of five hundred, scourging themselves with cords till their backs were piteously raw and bloody; many were boys, who, as one declared, did their penance for the sins of others, not for their own; they seemed to enjoy the sport; perhaps they had greased their backs, as Montaigne was told, and possibly they were well paid for their pains. But pious torture had certainly been gaily undergone; and the day was holy; among the ladies that looked on, not an amorous glance or gesture was to be discovered as the thousands of torches swept by towards St. Peter's. A popular religion in truth! The priest, wearing red gloves, displayed from his pulpit the handkerchief of St. Veronica; instantly the vast throng fell prostrate; and cries of pity and the sobs of weeping men and women filled the church; then the crowd changed

and was perpetually renewed. "Here," cries Montaigne, "is the true Papal Court; the pomp of Rome, and its principal grandeur, lies in the show of devotion. It is pleasant in these days to see the ardour for religion of a people, so infinite in number."

From Verona Montaigne journeyed by Vicenza and Padua to Venice; from Venice by Ferrara, Bologna, Florence, Siena, to Rome. With Venice he was somewhat disappointed, though the French ambassador, then troubled by his master's unpaid debts to the Venetians, strove to make himself entertaining, and the famous Veronica Franca, courtesan and authoress, honoured him with a copy of her *Letters*. Montaigne did not accept as final his first impressions, and resolved to return to Venice; in later years he thought of it as a place of happy retreat for one's decline into old age. At Ferrara, where M. d'Estissac presented his letters of commendation, the Duke conversed with the elder and the younger French gentlemen, and remained courteously uncovered during the whole reception. The *Essays* inform us of what the *Journal* is silent—that Montaigne also visited at Ferrara one more illustrious than the duke, the afflicted Tasso, then immured in the Hospital of Ste. Anna. He had often thought of insanity as one of the most appalling evidences of the infirmity of man, of how some trivial misad-

venture to the brain may in a moment convert the wisest philosopher to a driveller and a show. Tasso was not, like Swift, an object of repulsion; but he was a piteous example, as it seemed to Montaigne, of infinite wit, by virtue of its force and suppleness, turning against itself; reason had produced unreason; his mind's eye had been blinded by excess of light.

It was only on his later visit to Florence that Montaigne learnt her right to the title "*La bella*". On his way Romewards he was charged at a costly rate for uncomfortable quarters and poor entertainment. A dinner with the Grand Duke, a broad-shouldered dark man, with a genial countenance, made some amends; and there in the place of honour sat the voluptuous beauty, full-breasted, low-bodiced, Bianca Capello, now, after her shames and crimes, the Duchess of Florence.

As Montaigne drew towards Rome his eagerness increased. He believed that the dew of evening and of early morning was injurious to his health, but on the day that he passed through the Porta del Popolo—November 30, 1580—he set forth three hours before sunrise that he might see by daylight the approach to the city. He thought that he had known it well already; but Rome, like the ocean, is always new. For him it was, first, the buried Rome of the past, buried far deeper than he had imagined; but soon the life of the

present grew upon him. He saw in Rome a city existing for the court and the nobility, a centre of ecclesiastical idleness and ease, to which every one who would be in harmony with his surroundings must adapt himself; but also a centre for all the world, the great metropolitan, cosmopolitan city, in which differences of nationality almost disappeared. During the earlier days of his residence he walked unceasingly in the hilly district where the ancient city stood, but the city itself could not be traced, and it seemed to him that even the slopes of the hills must have changed their forms. He declared that "one could see nothing of Rome but the sky under which it lay and the outline of its site; that the knowledge he had respecting it was an abstract and contemplative knowledge, including nothing which addressed itself to the senses; that those who said that at least the ruins of Rome might be seen said too much; for the ruins of a machine so terrible would bring more of honour and of reverence to the memory of it; it was nothing but Rome's sepulchre." He went on to assert that the world, hostile to the long domination of Rome, had shattered into fragments the wonderful unity, and then, in horror of the deed, had buried the very ruins. As for the constructions of the modern bastard Rome, they reminded him of the nests hung by crows and martins from the roofs and walls of churches de-

molished by the Huguenots. Nowhere else does the *Journal* depart so far from its familiar style, and rise to a sustained rhetoric, as it does in this passage.

When Montaigne first came to Rome he procured the services of a French guide; but soon, with the aid of books and maps studied each evening, he made himself a complete master of highways and byways. He found always abundance of pleasant occupation. One day it is dinner with a French cardinal, followed by vespers in the Hall of the Consistory. Another, it is a visit through special favour to the Library of the Vatican, which the French ambassador had never been permitted to see. There Montaigne inspected with peculiar interest a manuscript of Seneca and a manuscript of the minor works of Plutarch; saw the handwriting of St. Thomas Aquinas, and the original written copy of the book upon the Sacraments which Henry VIII. of England had sent some sixty years previously to Pope Leo X. Now he observes the Muscovite ambassador in his furred hat, scarlet mantle, and coat of cloth of gold; and now he converses with an old Patriarch of Antioch, learned in many tongues, and receives from his hands a drug infallible as a remedy for his affliction, the stone. Or there are races along the Corso—races of children, Jews, old men naked—and Montaigne must look on. Or the

heads of St. Peter and St. Paul are exhibited in St. John Lateran, and the philosopher of the tower must needs be one of the devout. Twice, though tender-hearted, he witnessed the brutalities of public executions, in one instance with hacking and hewing of the dead body, responded to, at every stroke, by shudders and outcries of the crowd. And once he observed the pious process of an exorcism; but the priest had to explain that the devil, tenanting the possessed man, was of quite the worst species, obstinate, and particularly hard to deal with; only yesterday a similar operation had been quite successful, or would have been so, had not a second and less malicious demon entered into the patient and disguised the operator's triumph; he was acquainted, says Montaigne, with the names, the classification, and the particular distinctions of all the diabolic tribe. These were incidents of ordinary Roman days. But that was a high day when Montaigne was introduced by the French ambassador and the Papal chamberlain to His Holiness, Gregory XIII., when he knelt on one knee or on two knees at the appointed stations, and when, as he stooped to kiss the foot, His Holiness raised a little the red shoe with its cross of white to meet the lips of a faithful son of the Church. The Pope exhorted Montaigne to continue in that devotion which he had always manifested towards Rome,

and assured him and his companions that he would gladly render them any services in his power—the services, comments the narrator, of Italian phrases.

The ability and power of the Jesuits made a deep impression on Montaigne. Never did any other society, he thought, attain to eminence like theirs, or produce effects such as they were likely to produce. They held the whole of Christendom in possession; they formed a nursery of great men in every order of greatness. And yet he missed in Rome two things which he had found in Venice and in the Protestant cities of Germany and Switzerland—he missed order and he missed freedom. The safety of the streets, especially at night, was ill-secured; robberies were frequent; and at the same time to lift up one's voice against the sloth and luxury of the higher ecclesiastics was a crime visited with imprisonment. On entering Rome Montaigne had to permit his boxes to be searched by the officials, and all his books had been seized. One, *The Hours of Our Lady*, was viewed suspiciously because it was printed in Paris; others, because, though orthodox, they made mention of heretical errors. Fortunately he had not brought with him from Germany a single treatise by a Lutheran. Among the volumes in his baggage lay, however, a copy of his own lately published *Essays*, and this was carried off to be

examined by the experts in heresy-hunting and in the detection of literary improprieties. When, after a long interval of time, the book was returned to him, "castigated according to the opinion of the monastic doctors", the censure did not prove excessively severe. The Master of the Sacred Palace knew no French, and he was politely satisfied with Montaigne's explanation of the passages which had met the reader's disapproval; he left it to Montaigne's conscience to make amendments in whatever was wanting in good taste. Montaigne had used the word "Fortune"; he had named certain heretical poets, such as Bèze; he had apologised for Julian the Apostate; he had asserted that one who prays should for the time be free from vicious inclination; he had said that whatever goes beyond the mere punishment of death is cruelty; he had argued that a child should be rendered capable by education of doing all manner of things. Montaigne professed that he had only put forth his own opinions, not holding them for errors, and he alleged that his meaning had not been always rightly caught. The Maestro was gracious, and pleaded on the Essayist's side against an Italian who was present. When Montaigne was about to quit Rome and went to take his leave of his censors, the affair was a thing of the past; they begged him to pay no regard to the objections; they complimented

him on his good intentions, his ability, his affection for the Church; and they left it to himself to retrench in future editions whatever might seem too free-spoken, and in particular the references to Fortune. The speakers were persons of high authority, not cardinals, but "cardinalable". None the less Montaigne took his own way; in the edition of 1588 he made it clear that he expressed in the *Essays* only his private opinions, and used certain words in a layman's sense; but he altered not one of the passages against which the Roman censor had raised objections; Bèze was still commended as a poet; Julian the Apostate was honoured; and the incalculable residuum of forces which determines so many events was still described as Fortune.

In one of the later èssays, that on *Vanity*, it is Fortune that he thanks for an airy favour, but one highly valued by him, which crowned his ambition at Rome. He lived, as he says, with the dead; Lucullus, Metellus, and Scipio were to him as near and as real as his own father, who was also among the departed. A hundred times he had quarrelled on behalf of Pompey and for the cause of Brutus. To be himself a citizen of Rome, to possess the authentic bull of Roman burgess-rights, with all its pomp of seals and gilded letters —this was an object with splendid flattery in it for Montaigne's imagination. Was it a piece of

mere inanity and foppery to feel a pride in such a distinction? Well, there is plenty of foppery and inanity in each of us, which should make us deal lightly with the foible of Montaigne. He sought for the empty title, the *Journal* confesses, with "all his five natural senses"; the Pope's majordomo was kind and helpful; Fortune smiled upon his folly; and before he quitted the city on his pilgrimage to Loreto, the Senate and the people of Rome had decreed that the most illustrious Michel de Montaigne should be admitted to all those privileges which signified so little, and so much.

The journey to Loreto in the latter days of April, 1581, was full of delight. The *Journal* becomes picturesque in its descriptions of mountain and valley, wooded hill, and torrents transforming themselves on the level ground to pleasant and gentle streams. Yet Montaigne was not too much occupied either with thoughts of nature or of grace to restrain him from an outbreak of sudden indignation caused by the misconduct of his *vetturino;* the man's ears did not escape a smart boxing at the hands of the Roman citizen and Knight of the Order of St. Michael, who prudently altered his course lest he should be brought before a magistrate on the charge of assault. Pilgrims, single or in troops, clad in the appropriate garb, and bearing banners and

crosses, as he drew near to Loreto crowded the highway. In the holy place he gazed upon the wooden image of Our Lady, and in a favoured position affixed as an offering his silver figures of the Montaigne family. Having, in the chapel of the *Cassetta*, partaken of the Blessed Sacrament, and listened to many tales of miracles, ancient and modern, on the credibility of which he pronounces no judgment, he set forth before the end of April, in the faint hope of some healing for the body, towards the Baths of Lucca.

At the Bagni della Villa, Montaigne, who arrived before the season had opened, chose a lodging not merely for its interior comfort but because its outlook on the valley and mountains was beautiful; at night the soft rippling of the Lima was in his ears. His host, a gallant captain, was also an apothecary. Here, as at other baths which he had visited, he disregarded the regular mode of treatment and freely took his own way, believing that the waters could do little harm or good. "A vain thing, indeed," he sighs, "is medicine". But his malady was not always troublesome. Soon after the season had begun, observing a pleasant custom of the place, he invited both gentlefolk and rustics to a ball, and himself provided the pipers, the supper, and prizes for the most graceful dancers among the villagers. There is genuine glee in his record of the gaiety,

and of the ceremonious presentations to the prize-winners. And it was not only the comely maidens who were made happy by his kindness. Poor Divizia, thirty-seven years old, ugly, with her wallet of a goitre, unable to read or write, yet delighting to hear Ariosto recited, and shaping her poor thoughts and fancies into instinctive verse, was given a place at his table, and repaid his goodness with rhymes in his honour, which, though no more than rhymes, had a certain grace of style. It was the busy time, when mulberry leaves are plucked, and yet a hundred young men and maidens attended the dance.

Towards midsummer Montaigne left the baths and again visited Florence, where between chariot-races, state ceremonies on St. John's Day, inspecting ladies, purchasing books at the shop of the Giunti, and what not, he found much to entertain the time. Pisa, where his feeling for the beauty of art was in some degree awakened, and where a battle royal between ecclesiastics in the church of San Francesco made gossipry lively, pleased him as well or better. From Lucca, in mid-August, he returned to the Baths, and there on September 7 came a letter from Bordeaux which brought a great surprise for the reader—more than a month previously, as it informed him, he had been elected mayor of the city. Five days later he was on his way to Lucca. He did not

hasten back to France. He returned to Rome. But there upon the day of his arrival—Sunday, October 1, 1581—a letter was handed to him, from the jurats of Bordeaux, begging him earnestly to repair with all convenient speed to their city. On the morning of the 15th he parted from his young brother Mattecoulon, who stayed in Rome to perfect himself in the art of fencing, and from young d'Estissac, and was on his homeward way. Partly on horseback, partly borne in a litter, he crossed Mont Cenis; and, his impatience rising as he approached home, entered the château of Montaigne, after an absence of over seventeen months, on the last day of November, 1581.

CHAPTER XI

MONTAIGNE THE MAYOR: CLOSING YEARS

THE first act of Montaigne on learning that he had been elected mayor of Bordeaux was an expression of his wish to be "excused". A letter from Henri III., written at Paris five days before the traveller's arrival at the château, expressly enjoined him, under pain of the King's serious displeasure, to yield to the wishes of his fellow citizens. It was a time when the pointer of the political weather-glass trembled towards conciliation. Montaigne's predecessor in the mayoralty, a fiery spirit, the Marshal de Biron, had made himself unpleasing to the people, to Henri of Navarre, to his Queen, and now to Henri III. in his pacific mood. The election of Montaigne gratified all parties, except Biron and Biron's son. Montaigne's father had been a mayor devoted to his municipal duties; he was himself a man of some wealth and of much distinction; he was known to be no violent partisan, but on the contrary eminently reasonable, moderate, and discreet. But, if he was not old, he felt that he had lost some of his youthful energy; his health was

broken; he was a lover of retirement, one who commended "a life gliding shadowy and silent". With characteristic frankness and fidelity he represented himself to the electors as he felt himself to be—"without memory, without vigilance, without experience, and without vigour; but also without hatred, without ambition, without avarice, and without violence." They were not to expect him to be like his father; he could not undertake to lose himself in their civic affairs. He might lend himself to the public; but give himself he would not, and could not. It was, indeed, his habit to promise less than he hoped to perform. Much of wisdom, he thought, lies in finding the exact degree of friendship which each man owes himself; it is true that we cannot live aright for ourselves unless we live for others; and when duties have been accepted, we must bestow our best care and attention upon them, and "if need be our sweat and our blood". Yet if we can give our gifts quietly, without eagerness or perturbation, and can still possess our souls, it will be best. Even business itself will move more surely and more smoothly if, in a certain sense, we stand above it, and remain sufficiently detached from it to exercise on every matter a disinterested judgment and use our address and skill in business cheerfully, but without passion.

With thoughts such as these Montaigne ac-

cepted an office which he had never thought of seeking and was obedient to the King's monition. It was an office of no common distinction. The privileges of which Bordeaux had been deprived after the revolt of the Gabelle were now almost fully restored to the city. Montaigne's predecessors had been persons of eminence. For being influenced by this consideration he smilingly finds a precedent in Alexander the Great, who declined the citizenship of Corinth until he was informed that Bacchus and Hercules were also on the register. The actual duties of the mayoralty in times of quiet were not arduous, but the mayor was important, robed in his brocaded red-and-white velvets or satins, as a representative of the ancient dignities of Bordeaux; he took precedence of many eminent nobles, and in times of disturbance his responsibility was great. The office was without emolument, and was held for a period of two years, with the possibility of reëlection; Montaigne could feel that if he lent himself to the interests of his fellow citizens, it was no affair of hire or salary, but an unmercenary loan. The titular governor of Guyenne, under the King of France, was Henri of Navarre. The active authority was wielded by the lieutenant-governor, the Marshal de Matignon, whom Montaigne had met at the siege of La Fère, a courageous and loyal Catholic, but liberal, tolerant, and discreet.

With him such an official as Montaigne would not find it difficult to coöperate.

Montaigne's period of mayoralty was extended, by reëlection in 1583, from two to four years. The first term of office passed in comparative tranquillity. It was necessary to recall the Jesuits to a sense of their duty towards the unhappy foundlings, whose care they had undertaken in consideration of certain advantages to themselves, and had transferred at a low rate of payment to an unscrupulous agent, with the result that the mortality among the little ones had become a scandal. The self-indulgent egoist of the Montaigne legend—which is not wholly a legend—came forward on this occasion as a defender of the weak against the strong. In the first days after his reëlection he shows himself again in the same character. Many of the wealthy inhabitants of Bordeaux had asserted their right to exemption from certain taxes on the ground of being connected directly or indirectly with the public administration, and the taxes in consequence bore heavily upon the poor. The mayor and the jurats made the cause of the feeble their own, and addressed a spirited remonstrance to the King, taking the opportunity also to urge that each parish should maintain its own poor, and that religious foundations should not neglect their charitable duties. In his own old school, the Col-

lege of Guyenne, the mayor maintained his interest; towards the rival institution, of more recent origin, presided over by the Jesuits, he showed, as far as can be ascertained, no hostility; but the college to which his father had sent him when a boy, now presided over by the venerable Élie Vinet, claimed his special regard, and he gave his official approval to the regulations which were published in 1583 under the title, *Schola aquitanica*. He pleaded with the lieutenant-governor, Henri of Navarre, on behalf of those who were suffering from restraints placed upon the free navigation of the Garonne. He assisted in making arrangements for the reconstruction of the Tour de Cordouan, a lighthouse essential for the security of sailors near the point where the Gironde meets the sea. He journeyed to Paris probably to secure the complete restoration of the privileges of his fellow citizens. Montaigne had not promised to be very zealous in public affairs, and at times he preferred his quiet château to the streets of Bordeaux; but upon the whole he was better than his word.

By the convention of Fleix it had been determined that, with a view to securing judicial impartiality between the contending parties in the province, a new Court of Justice for Guyenne, the members of which were to be drawn from more disinterested quarters than Bordeaux, should be

established, and should hold its first session in the city over which Montaigne presided as mayor. Its proceedings were opened in January 1582. Among the members were the future historian, Jacques-Auguste de Thou, then aged twenty-nine, and a grandson of Montaigne's friend, the Chancellor l'Hôpital. An inaugural address, explaining the origin and object of the court, and proclaiming, in oratorical periods, the doctrine of conciliation, was delivered in the great hall of the convent of the Jacobins, and in the presence of Montaigne, by the advocate-general, Antoine Loisel. He also pronounced the closing address in August of the same year. The first of these discourses, published in 1584 under the title *Of the Eye of Kings and of Justice*, was not long since announced by an English writer as possibly a hitherto unrecognised work of Montaigne; the Montaignophiles of Bordeaux smiled at the courageous discoverer, and one of them had the infinite satisfaction—at which Montaigne himself might have smiled—of exposing the incompetence of the "*bibliophile anglais*".* The second discourse, designed to do honour to the city of Bordeaux (where the speaker had passed several months), to its monuments, and to its illustrious

* See *Un Livre inconnu attribuable à Montaigne* . . . par Philomneste Senior, Bordeaux: 1902.

citizens—among others to the citizen of Rome who now was mayor—is dedicated to Montaigne, "one of the principal ornaments not only of Guyenne but also of the whole of France". When the *Essays* were published in the edition of 1588, Montaigne presented a copy to Loisel bearing an inscription in which, with an added touch of humorous self-depreciation, he begs for the kind advice of his friend. Loisel's colleague, De Thou, was already devoted to historical research. In his *Memoirs* he speaks of his intercourse with Montaigne. "He gained," he says, "much instruction from Michel de Montaigne—a man of frank and open nature, averse to all constraint, one who had entered into no cabal; highly instructed, moreover, in our affairs, chiefly in those of Guyenne, his native country, about which he was thoroughly informed."

The mayor of Bordeaux, during his first two years of office, was little concerned in political affairs. But the season of political calm was passing away. Already some trouble had arisen between the municipal authorities and the Baron de Vaillac, a man of extreme Catholic sympathies, governor of the Château Trompette, which from a military point of view dominated the city. The reëlection of Montaigne did not pass without some resistance, though a resistance that was brushed aside on an appeal to the King. In

August of that year Henri III., after his public insults to his sister, the Queen of Navarre, had ordered her to quit Paris. Dishonoured as she was with accusations of a shameless life, Marguerite was an outcast from her husband. In November Henri of Navarre took sudden action, seized upon Mont-de-Marsan, and held it in force. It was a part of prudence that he should stand well with the mayor of Bordeaux. A series of letters were addressed by Du Plessis-Mornay, on behalf of his master, to Montaigne with the object of detaching him from the lieutenant-governor, Matignon, or at least of securing a fair hearing for the explanations and pleas of the King of Navarre. Mornay had the assurance that the mayor of Bordeaux, in his "tranquillity of spirit, was neither a stirrer up of strife nor himself stirred up for a light cause". His master, he assured Montaigne, desired nothing but peace.

And, in truth, peace was convenient at this moment for the King of Navarre, but he desired to obtain favourable military concessions as an equivalent for his generosity in receiving back his discredited Queen. Suddenly, while these negotiations were in progress, the whole position of affairs was altered by what Montaigne might have named Fortune. On June 10, 1584, the Duke of Anjou died, and by his death left Henri of Na-

varre the heir presumptive to the throne of France.

Montaigne held Henri of Navarre in high esteem; he accepted a legitimate title because it was legitimate; he saw no serious difficulty in the King's adherence to the Reformed Faith, which he regarded aright as more politic than theological; and Henri assuredly believed in tolerance and humanity. When the League put forward the Cardinal de Bourbon as a rival claimant for the succession of the crown, no support was given to the faction by Montaigne. In the spring of 1584 he was at the château, resting and recovering from an attack of his malady. In May he was engaged as an intermediary between the King of Navarre and Matignon. Towards the close of the same year Henri was at no great distance from the château. The jurats of Bordeaux entreated the mayor to return to the city; he had no choice but to excuse himself—he had the whole court of the King of Navarre upon his hands; they were about to come and see him; by and by he would be more free; meanwhile, in the matter which immediately concerned them, his presence, he assured them, would bring them "nothing but his own embarrassment and uncertainty in forming an opinion or a decision".

A few days later, on December 19, 1584, Henri of Navarre, followed by a train of some forty

persons of the highest distinction, arrived at the château of Montaigne. It had never before entertained so brilliant an assemblage, and Montaigne enumerates with pride the names of the principal guests in his copy of Beuther's *Ephemcrides*. They were served by his own attendants; here was no fear of foul play, and the meats were eaten unassayed; the King slept in Montaigne's own bed. During two days they enjoyed the hospitality of the château, and as they set forth a stag was started for them in their host's forest, which gave them sport for two days more. This on Montaigne's part was honourable service to the future King of France. Had he desired to ingratiate himself in dishonourable ways, the opportunity for doing so was open to him. Montaigne had long been in cordial relations with Diane d'Andouins, "*la belle Corisande*", who now held Henri under her spell. He chose a more courageous and an honester course of action than that of flattering her on her triumph; he counselled her "not to entangle with his passions the interest and fortune of the prince, and since her influence over him was so great to have more consideration for his usefulness * than his private humours." She may have regarded such advice, without active resentment, as part of

* Or perhaps "his profit"—"*utilité*".

an old friend's kindly prudence, but she had a more powerful counsellor in the passion of the King.

Though looking upon the King of Navarre as the hope of France, Montaigne never forgot that his loyalty was due to Henri III. The old mariner in a great tempest, he tells us in one of his essays, spoke thus to Neptune: "O God, thou wilt save me, if it be thy will, and if thou choosest, thou wilt destroy me; but, however it be, I will always hold my rudder straight." And, indeed, a supple, ambiguous man might have been less secure than Montaigne. He kept himself in close communication with Matignon, the acting representative of the King of France, and furnished him, in letters which remain to us, with whatever information might prove useful. The danger of the time, and especially the danger for the peace of Bordeaux, arose more from the designs of the League than from those of the King of Navarre. In April, 1585, the Leaguers had the hope that by a sudden rising they might obtain command of the city. Vaillac, the governor of the Château Trompette, was zealous in their cause. With the pretext that he had orders to communicate from the King, Matignon summoned an assembly of the mayor, the jurats, and the principal members of the administration. The passages to the chamber in Matignon's *hôtel* were

occupied by armed guards. In some opening words he spoke of the evil intentions of the League; he went on to explain the immediate danger to the city, for which the remedy must needs be short and sharp. Then turning his eyes on Vaillac, he declared that his fidelity was suspected, and that he must forthwith place the Château Trompette in loyal hands. Vaillac quailed, but protested and pleaded his honour. Matignon silenced the speaker, demanded obedience under threat of immediate execution in presence of his garrison, disarmed him, delivered him to the guards, and directed the mayor to make known to the citizens of Bordeaux the purposes of the King and his lieutenant-governor. For some hours Vaillac still resisted, then made a virtue of necessity, was handed back his sword, and standing at the gate of the Château Trompette directed his officers to come forth and take their orders from the marshal. It only remained for the mayor and jurats some days later to embody in writing a fervent declaration of their loyalty to the King.

Thus the danger from the Leaguers within Bordeaux was averted. The movements of the Huguenots throughout the province caused anxiety from the opposite side. A month after the seizure of the Château Trompette, Matignon was absent at Agen, and had left the city under

the care of men on whom he could rely and, among them, the mayor. The responsibility weighed upon Montaigne; he saw to gates and guards, feared some unforeseen movement which might suddenly "take him by the throat", and prayed for the return of the marshal. It was the time of the annual review of the armed citizens of Bordeaux. Some of the authorities hesitated and spoke of the serious risks, under the present circumstances, of such a gathering. Montaigne, who always walked with head erect, urged that prudence lay in boldness; the officials, whose danger was greatest, should, he declared, assume a confident bearing, and should beg the captains to order that the salvoes should be "*belles et gaillardes*" in honour of those who were present, and that the powder should not be spared. Montaigne's counsel was justified by the event, yet still there was much cause for anxiety. On May 27 he writes to Matignon: "The neighbourhood of M. de Vaillac fills us with alarms, and there is no day that does not bring fifty and of an urgent nature. We most humbly beg you to come to us as soon as ever your affairs will permit you. I have passed every night either in the city under arms or without the city on the port; and before receiving your information, I had already watched throughout the night, upon intelligence of a boat laden with armed men,

which was to pass." A postscript adds the words: "Every day I have been at the Château Trompette. You will find the platform made. I see the Archbishop daily."

A more irresistible terror than that caused by the machinations of the League invaded Bordeaux as Montaigne's second period of mayoralty drew towards a close. The city was stricken by the plague. Almost every citizen whose circumstances permitted it took to flight. The Parliament ceased to sit. On the last day of July Montaigne's term of office expired. Matignon had returned to the stricken city a month previously. On the eve of the election of Matignon as his successor, Montaigne was at Libourne. He wrote to the jurats, assuring them that he would spare neither his life nor any other thing in their service, and leaving it to them to decide whether the gain of his presence at the approaching election was worth the risk which he should run by entering the infected city. He proposed, as a compromise, that he should next day approach as near as Feuillas, a château opposite Bordeaux on the right bank of the Garonne, and should there deliver up his charge. On July 31 he was at Feuillas, and again addressed a letter to the jurats. His last act as mayor of Bordeaux was to give the weight of his authority against the inhuman practice of taking women and children prisoners.

Our information should be much fuller than it is at present before we should be justified in passing a sentence of condemnation on Montaigne for remaining absent from the city during the visitation of the plague. Matignon may have made such arrangements as would have rendered Montaigne's residence in Bordeaux an act of useless chivalry. Neither Matignon nor any of his contemporaries censured him. He was not, as was Rotrou, poet and mayor of Dreux, who perished through his zeal, a man of the heroic breed; but he was a loyal man, who would neglect nothing that he judged to be a real duty. He had recently borne much stress and strain; he had shown his energy, his courage, and his public spirit. Some months previously his state of health had made it needful for him to retire to the repose of his château. We cannot tell whether an access of his malady did not compel him to retire again. "Nothing noble," he wrote, "can be done without hazard. . . . Prudence, so delicate and circumspect, is a mortal enemy of high exploits." We do not know whether high exploits were possible for Montaigne; we do not know whether he yielded to necessity or to an unheroic prudence; we can neither applaud nor justly condemn.

Looking back upon his services as mayor of Bordeaux, he did not himself find much to praise

or anything to blame. He had played his part; he had donned his shirt, but the shirt was not the skin—"the mayor and Montaigne were always two, with a very evident separation". His work had been that of conserving and holding on—"*conserver et durer*", not the work of an initiator or a reformer: "To forbear doing is often as generous as to do, but it is less in the light, and what little worth I have is of this kind." On the whole Bordeaux during his administration had enjoyed "a sweet and silent tranquillity"; if this was due to Providence rather than to any exertions of his, he was well content that he should owe his successes to the grace of God. He was not satisfied with himself, but he had done almost as well as he had hoped to do, and had exceeded by a great deal what he had promised to others. He was confident that he had left no offence or hatred behind him—"to leave behind regret and desire for me I at least know for certain was not a thing which I greatly affected." His hours of office passed without mark or trace. Very well!—"*il est bon!*" He might be accused of doing too little, but was it not a time when almost every one might be convicted of doing too much? So he ponders the past, and his final verdict upon himself is given in all sincerity—"I did not, to my knowledge, omit any exertion which my duty really demanded of me."

The plague was not confined to the city of Bordeaux. It ravaged the country, and reached the neighbourhood of Montaigne's château, where contagion had never before, in the memory of man, obtained a hold. The grapes hung untouched upon the vines, the fields were neglected; no outcries of lamentation or despair were heard; the peasantry accepted the inevitable with a strange patience, came, as it were, to terms with death, and cared only that their bodies might not lie uncovered by the earth. Montaigne had not much apprehension for himself; he believed that he was little liable to infection; and death by the plague did not seem to him the worst of deaths. But his wife, his daughter, and his aged mother must, if possible, be placed in safety, and he must act as guide and conductor to his caravan of distracted women. His undefended house was pillaged by the irregular soldiery wandering over the country. Persons passing from an infected district to one still free from attack were regarded with horror; if one's finger ached, it must needs be the plague, and departure was demanded. Montaigne, who had been so hospitable, could with difficulty find any shelter for his family, and during six miserable months they shifted from place to place. Two excellent preservatives, however, he always carried with him—resolution and endurance.

The evil days passed, and probably before the end of the year the homeless wanderers had returned to the château. Montaigne was freed from anxiety, released from public duties in Bordeaux, and able once more to enjoy the delights of solitude or the company of his beloved books; able to read, to invite his soul, and to speak to the sheets of paper that lay before him. During the interval between the close of 1585 and the opening of 1588 he occupied himself with preparing the *Essays* in the form in which they appeared in the latter year. The *Essays* in the original edition of 1580 had met with a favourable reception; two years later they were reprinted with a few slight touches showing the author's interest in his work. The edition of 1588 is called on the title-page the fifth; but only those now mentioned, and a Paris reprint of 1587, are known. That which has disappeared is conjectured to have been an unauthorised reprint of Rouen.

Montaigne had been asked to write a history of his own times, which, it was supposed, would have had the advantage of being the work of an impartial spectator rather than of a heated partisan. But he could not lay such a burden upon his own shoulders. The free, discontinuous way of writing suited his temper best. Yet, in the new confidence acquired from proofs of his popularity as an author, he was disposed to let his chapters

run to greater length, if they were not formal in their continuity; if within the ampler bounds he might go forward or turn aside as the humour took him. He thought that the frequent breaks in the earlier and shorter essays dissipated the reader's attention almost as soon as it was created; a reader who would not give an hour gave him nothing, and need not be considered. He spoke more freely and familiarly of himself, feeling now more than ever before that any contribution he could make towards true views of human life must be taken in relation to the speaker; the angle of incidence where the ray impinges must be calculated; the book was no more than the opinions of Michel de Montaigne, but while he might have his individual peculiarities, which ought to be known, he had within him also something of universal humanity. He drew such wisdom as he had to offer primarily from himself. In writing he did not need a great library; he looked with some scorn upon scholars of mendicant understanding, who gather the alms of knowledge from their shelves. As for himself, Plutarch was enough, Plutarch alone was indispensable. If he borrowed, it was to make others say for him with happier utterance what he had himself thought. And it was pleasant to consider that if a reader quarrelled with the Essayist, he might really be railing, not against Montaigne,

but Seneca; or in giving a fillip on Montaigne's nose might in fact make Plutarch his jest or his victim. Wherever in his reading he noted a quotation which confirmed or added force to what he had written, he inserted it in an appropriate place. Many of the additions to the first two Books are of this kind; but the earlier essays were elastic enough to be extended in other ways; a place here and a place there was found for anecdotes, personal reminiscences, new and striking thoughts; something of the original scheme and sequence was lost; but scheme and sequence were not the special virtue of the *Essays*. The banyan-tree threw down its branches; and, as they rooted, they changed to trunks supporting more spacious crowns. To trace out the logic of an essay, the earlier form is valuable; but the added wisdom and play of mind more than make amends, in such work as this, for any loss of formal evolution. "I add, but I correct not", he says; and he goes on to explain that having parted with his book, he no longer felt that it was his to alter, nor indeed was he sure that years had brought him any new wisdom which might justify emendations of the work of his former self. And yet, in fact, there are passages where he alters as well as adds, in some few instances qualifying or attenuating what he had previously written, but more often enhancing the force of his idea or the

vivacity of its expression. To the criticism of friends or acquaintances Montaigne was not disposed to yield; if a definite error were pointed out he was willing to correct it; but if objections were made to his crowded metaphors, his seeming paradoxes, his imperfect knowledge, his Gascon turns of expression, his words uttered in jest which might be taken for words uttered in earnest, he had an answer ready. These things were part of himself; he had represented himself to the life; every one would recognise him in his book, and the book in him. If the whole volume was a piece of ill-joined marquetry, it was the marquetry of an ill-joined mind. If he fagoted his notions as they fell, was not he himself no better than a bundle of humorous diversities?

Solitude among unlettered folk did not seem to Montaigne to be wholly a disadvantage. Under other conditions his book might have been better, but it might have been less his own. He met hardly a man who understood the Latin of his *Paternoster;* he had no assistant to aid him or to lighten his labours. Yet one man of learning he did meet, and entertained in July, 1586, under his hospitable roof. Pope, in one of his "moral essays", connects the name of Montaigne with that of "more sage Charron"—more sage, says Warburton, because Charron moderated the extreme Pyrrhonism of Montaigne. In truth he

systematised and methodised the suspended judgment of Montaigne, or inclined the balance of "*Que sçay-je?*" towards nescience rather than knowledge. He was eight years younger than Montaigne, joyous of temper, jovial of countenance, an ecclesiastic of distinction, a believer who was also a sceptic, qualified in all ways, except for a certain lack of intellectual flexibility, to be Montaigne's devoted disciple. Such a disciple was welcome to the solitary philosopher of the tower; "praise," we read in the *Essays*, "is always pleasant"; and discipleship is the most efficient kind of praise. After all, Montaigne had belied himself—he could produce not only "essays", but "effects".

Early in 1588 Montaigne left the château for Paris, probably with the intention of superintending the new edition of the *Essays* as it went through the press. Near the forest of Villebois he was attacked by a band of some fifteen or twenty gentlemen of the League, wearing vizors, and followed by an overwhelming wave of musketeers on horseback. He was dismounted, robbed of his horse, his money, his papers, all his possessions of travel. His ransom was discussed; his life seemed to be in question. He bore himself stoutly; and once again, as in the former plot to seize upon the château, he was saved by his frank, courageous countenance and his gallant

speech. According to the dramatic version of the incident given in the essay on *Physiognomy*, the leader pulled off his vizor, declared his name, and restored to the captive all that he had been deprived of. A letter to Matignon written from Orleans represents the Leaguers as less generous; they dismissed him, but retained his money, with many of his papers and part of his other properties. It may be that these were afterwards sent to him and that the dramatist of the *Essays* does not depart very widely from the prosaic facts.

About midsummer, 1588, the *Essays* in their new form appeared. To this period of Montaigne's residence in Paris we may with probability refer a dangerous illness spoken of by his friend Pierre de Brach, the poet and advocate, of Bordeaux, in a letter addressed after the Essayist's death to the eminent humanist, Justus Lipsius. "Being together, some years ago, in Paris," he writes, "the physicians despairing of his life, and he himself hoping only for his end, I saw him when death looked him closest in the face, repel far from him its terror by contemning it." De Brach goes on to describe Montaigne's equanimity, and to refer to his words of philosophic wisdom; "he had cheated death by his self-possession, and death cheated him by his convalescence." He was sufficiently recovered in June and July to follow the French King in some of the

enforced wanderings of his Court when the capital was held by the Duke of Guise and the League. A disagreeable surprise awaited Montaigne on his return from Rouen to Paris. He was seized at his lodgings in the Faubourg St. Germain and he, who had never known the interior of a prison, found himself, as we learn from the *Ephemerides*, a prisoner in the Bastille. He was told that his seizure was by way of reprisal for the like treatment by the King of a gentleman of Normandy. It was a brief incarceration, hardly long enough to widen the basis of Montaigne's experience. His arrest was at three or four o'clock on the afternoon of July 10; at eight o'clock in the evening of the same day he was released. The favour was granted through the special intervention of the Queen Mother, Catherine de' Medici.

Paris, which he loved so warmly, was not wholly unkind. It was here that he had received an eager salutation from a young, accomplished, and enthusiastic stranger, attracted to him solely by her admiration of the *Essays*, Marie le Jars de Gournay. Montaigne was no surly philosopher of the cynic sect. He responded with all the warmth of fifty-five years, which had not grown frosty, to the ardour of her summer-time of twenty-three. Soon he became her spiritual father and she became his "*fille d'alliance*", a title by which,

as she herself declares, she felt herself "glorified and beatified". She lived in Picardy with her mother, the widow of a distinguished public official who had died young; she read with passionate curiosity, mastered Latin, faltered at Greek, and before the year 1588 was ended, had written a romance of love, in the Renaissance manner, with a Persian princess for her heroine. In honour of the visits of Montaigne to Gournay-sur-Aronde—visits which extended over some three months—and especially with a recollection of one walk in the course of which Marie disclosed its plot, the romance was proudly entitled *Le Proumenoir de M. de Montaigne.* The philosopher received the homage of his female disciple with grateful feelings. He celebrates the friendship which came to him so late in a passage at the close of the essay on *Presumption,* a passage added in the posthumous edition of 1595, which Mlle. de Gournay herself saw through the press. In her edition of 1635, dedicated to Cardinal Richelieu, the old lady, who then seemed to belong to a remote generation of the past, modestly suppressed her own praises, and apologised for this audacious modesty.

On October 15, 1588, the States General met at Blois. Montaigne was present not in an official capacity but as an interested observer. There, renewing his former acquaintance, he discussed

public affairs with De Thou. There he listened, silently and no doubt smilingly, to Pasquier as he pointed out the atrocious Gasconisms of the language of the *Essays;* the critic was confident that he had made an impression, but the Gasconisms reappear in the posthumous text, although the author had made careful preparations for the edition which he did not live to superintend. There, too, he conversed with the King's geographer, De Laval, and it has been plausibly conjectured that certain annotations made by Laval upon the *Essays* may contain traces of the conversations at Blois.

The assassination of Guise, during the session of the States General at Blois, was avenged before many months by the assassination of the French King, who had distributed the daggers to his murderers. In August, 1589, the King of Navarre became the King of France, though not as yet with an undisputed title. Montaigne had returned to Bordeaux before the startling event of the preceding Christmas-tide. The vigorous rule of Matignon, shown in his expulsion of the Jesuits from the city, had preserved Bordeaux from the domination of the League. We cannot doubt that Montaigne was hopeful that the poor vessel, France, would at length right herself under the steerage of so skilful and prudent a helmsman as Henri IV. Three days after the battle of Coutras,

in October, 1587, Henri had visited for the second time the château of Montaigne. It is doubtless the King whom Montaigne describes, without naming him, in the essay on the *Management of the Will,* applauding him for his tranquil self-possession and freedom of spirit in the conduct of great and thorny affairs—"I find him greater and more capable in ill fortune than in good; his losses are more glorious than his victories, and his mourning than his triumph." Montaigne was well aware—so, recalling a conversation, reports Agrippa d'Aubigné—that in reaching the throne the last step was the highest and most difficult of all. He did not live to hear of the meeting of the States General at the Louvre, in January, 1593, the reconciliation of Henri to the Church of Rome, and the submission of Paris to the King. But before the battle of Ivry he could see whither things were tending. In two admirable letters addressed by Montaigne to Henri, in reply to letters from the King, he unites entire loyalty with a gracious independence. In the earlier, dated January 18, 1590, he congratulates the King on the successes which had attended his arms, and expresses his hope that the tide of popular favour had now begun to flow in his direction; at the same time he regrets that any of the King's successes should have been tarnished by the violence or rapacity of his soldiery; he could have wished

that Henri had had the opportunity as a victor of being more generous to his mutinous subjects than their own leaders had shown themselves. The welfare of King and people are in truth essentially bound together; it was to be desired that every good fortune which befell the King should cause him to be rather loved than feared by his subjects. Such thoughts and aspirations as these speak nobly for the writer's heart and intellect. The second letter, written in September of the same year, declares his zeal to obey certain commands of the King, which required that he should hold personal communication with Matignon. In response to some proposal that he should attend upon Henri and receive a recompense for his services, he professes with an honourable pride that whatever duties he may at any time have rendered to the throne were disinterested and unrewarded: "I am, Sire, as rich as I wish to be. When I shall have exhausted my purse in attendance on Your Majesty in Paris, I shall make bold to let you know it; and then, should you think me worthy of being retained in your suite, you shall have me at a cheaper rate than the most insignificant of your officers."

Montaigne had not the happiness to see Henri IV. in the Louvre. His years were drawing to a close. He occupied himself partly in the affairs of his estate, his husbandry and his vines. He

corresponded with the eminent scholar, Justus Lipsius, to whose learning he does honour in the *Essays*, and with his "*fille d'alliance*", Mlle. de Gournay; but none of these letters of Montaigne have reached us. He gave much time to revising the *Essays* in their enlarged form of 1588, and to enlarging them yet further with a view to a future edition.

In June, 1590, the château lost some of its brightness. Léonor, Montaigne's only living child, then aged nineteen, was married on May 27 to François de la Tour, and three weeks later she departed with her husband to her new home in Saintonge. Next year, at the close of March, a grandchild of Montaigne's was born, a girl, to whom the Christian name, Françoise, that of Léonor's mother—the infant's godmother—was given. The child was precocious at least in wedlock, being married, with a view to arrangements respecting property, at the age of nine to a husband aged six.

We possess but scanty memorials of Montaigne's last illness, and yet enough to assure us that he foresaw and calmly accepted the end. The letter of the poet Pierre de Brach (who was not present) to Justus Lipsius is one of sorrow, somewhat rhetorically dressed, and tells little more than that Montaigne regretted that he had no one near him "to whom he could unfold the last

conceptions of his soul". Florimond de Raymond, on the other hand, speaks of Montaigne's "philosophising between the extreme fits of suffering". Pasquier states that for three days he was without the power of speech and expressed his wishes by his pen; he adds that he summoned certain gentlemen, his neighbours, to bid them farewell; and it is he who mentions, speaking from hearsay, that Montaigne with a pious gesture rendered up his soul to God at the moment of "the elevation of the *Corpus Domini*".

Bernard Anthone, in his commentary on the customs of Bordeaux, relates what we can well believe to be founded on fact; feeling his end approach, Montaigne rose from bed, threw his dressing-gown around him, opened his cabinet, and bade them summon all his valets and other legatees, to whom he paid in person the bequests left them by his will. The immediate cause of Montaigne's death was said to be the quinsy; but his health had long been declining. He died on September 13, 1592, when a little more than midway in the sixtieth year of his age. We may hope that the most natural of all incidents was accepted tranquilly by Montaigne and was preceded by no fanfaronade of philosophy or ostentation of feelings that had not been part of the habit of his mind.

An entry written in the *Ephemerides* in an unknown hand records that the heart of Montaigne was deposited in the church of St. Michel Montaigne, where it is supposed to have remained undisturbed. The body was conveyed to Bordeaux and was placed in the church of the Feuillants, May 1, 1593. An enlargement of the church led to the transfer of the coffin in 1614 to the crypt of a lateral chapel. In September, 1800, a pompous translation of what was supposed to be the remains of Montaigne from the church to the museum of the city took place; it was ascertained before long that the honours had been paid not to the ashes of Montaigne but to those of his niece. In 1871, in consequence of a fire, the recumbent statue, clad in armour, resting on the sarcophagus, was placed in the vestibule of the Faculties of Bordeaux. Epitaphs in Greek verse and in Latin prose, believed to be the compositions of a Bordeaux scholar of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Jean de St. Martin, celebrate the virtues and the distinctions of the dead with perhaps a little less vagueness in eulogy than is common in such inscriptions. The sage, declares the Greek epitaph, allied to the dogma of Christ the scepticism of Pyrrho. The words in Latin tell of his incomparable judgment, his wide sympathies, his incapacity either to flatter or to wound, the becoming close to his admirable

life, and the devotion of Montaigne's widow to his memory.

Mme. de Montaigne lost her husband when she was forty-eight years of age. She lived to be eighty-three. In all that concerned the fame of her husband she was deeply interested; and, devout as she was, she was resolute in asserting her rights to do his memory all due honour, when the religious men of the Church of the Feuillants found it convenient to neglect their engagements respecting his place of burial. To her excellent judgment and loyal regard for her husband's wishes we owe the first text of the *Essays*. During his declining days Montaigne had kept before him a copy of the edition of 1588 and had covered the margins with innumerable additions and alterations; he had revised the spelling of words, and in a considerable degree altered his system of punctuation, partly with a view to breaking up sentences that straggled to excessive length; he had written directions to guide the printer. The copy of the book which he had thus prepared is doubtless that which at present is a chief treasure of the public library of the city of Bordeaux. The posthumous edition, seen through the press at Paris, by Mlle. de Gournay, and published in folio by Abel L'Angelier in the year 1595, differs in many details from the manuscript text on the margins of the Bordeaux copy.

To some extent modifications may have been deemed necessary or advisable by Mlle. de Gournay, but according to the ideas of the time she seems to have executed her task with substantial fidelity. A second corrected copy, differing in details from that which remains, may have disappeared; more probably the additional corrections and alterations may have been inserted by Montaigne on loose slips of paper which, after use had been made of them, were not preserved. Until after she had completed her preparation of the edition of 1595, Montaigne's "*fille d'alliance*" was not an inmate of the château. She acknowledges her obligations to Pierre de Brach, the poet of Bordeaux and the friend of the Essayist. It seems to be certain that Mme. de Montaigne placed the manuscript material in the hands of De Brach, and that he furnished Mlle. de Gournay with the copy on which she and the printers went to work. No quarrels of authors arose; all parties, as far as we can perceive, laboured harmoniously together, and when her toil of some nine months was at an end, Mlle. de Gournay visited Montaigne's widow and daughter and found herself among the places with which the memories of her spiritual father were most closely associated. There are some readers who prefer the form of the *Essays* which their author had himself put forth in 1588 to the more en-

cumbered and sometimes interrupted mass of reflections and reminiscences which make up the posthumous edition. But the gains must be set over against the losses. Much that is valuable, much that is characteristic is to be found only in the edition of 1595. An author has a right to present his work as he deems best, and though Montaigne did not live to bestow his own care upon the *Essays* as they reached the press in their final form, there is no doubt that the posthumous edition approximates closely to what he would have desired to see.

Montaigne's daughter lost her husband in 1594, four years after her marriage. In 1608 she became the wife of Charles de Gamaches, who took up his abode in the château, then the property of Léonor. There was composed his volume directed against the principles of the Reformed Faith,* but it cannot be said that the atmosphere of the tower imparted literary inspiration to Montaigne's son-in-law; such interest as his work possesses must be sought in its references to the kinsfolk and descendants of Montaigne. The little girl, child of Léonor's first husband, who had gone through the form of marriage with Honoré de Lur, a child younger than herself,

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* *Le Sensé raisonnant sur les passages de l'Écriture-Saincte contre les prétendus réformez.*

died twelve years later (1612) in giving birth to a son. This Charles de Lur was killed at the siege of Salces in Roussillon in 1639, and left no offspring. By her marriage with Charles de Gamaches, Léonor became mother of a second daughter, who at seventeen found a husband in the brother-in-law of her half-sister. Through this granddaughter of Montaigne—Marie de Lur —his posterity has been continued to our own days. Léonor died in 1616, leaving the little Marie to be the comfort of Mme. de Montaigne's old age. Her father's library was bequeathed by Léonor to M. de Rochefort, grand-vicar of the archbishopric of Auch. The château remained in the possession of descendants of Montaigne until the year 1811.

To trace the influence of Montaigne on French and on English literature is beyond the scope of this volume. It would be of deep interest to study the impression made by Montaigne's writings upon the mind of Pascal, the acceptance and the more vehement rejection of his spirit and his philosophical doctrine by a spirit having certain points of kinship and much more of contrast or opposition to his own. The reader must seek for the history of this contention of two great minds in Sainte-Beuve's volumes upon *Port-Royal*. In England from the first Montaigne was accepted almost as if he had been an English writer.

Within a few years after their author's death the *Essays* were translated by Florio in a version which, if it sometimes departs widely from the original, has the merit of being written in the vivid and picturesque language of the time of Elizabeth. From *Hamlet* to *The Tempest*—if not in earlier plays—traces of Montaigne may be found in Shakespeare. A copy of Florio's translation, with what may be the autograph signature of Shakespeare on the fly-leaf, is in the British Museum. There, also, is the copy of the *Essays* possessed by Ben Jonson. The title of the most popular of the writings of Bacon—that which most came home to men's business and bosoms—is taken from Montaigne. In the first of Bacon's essays Montaigne is quoted, and with a reference to Bacon's source. Sir William Cornwallis, the younger, adopted for his volume of 1600 the same title—*Essays*—and in the Second Part, published in 1610, he claimed that title as appropriate rather for 'prentice work like his own than for such accomplished writings as those of Montaigne, which "are able to endure the sharpest trial". During the contention between Roundhead and Cavalier the temperate wisdom of Montaigne was not much to the mind of the embittered parties, though at such a time its lessons would have been most seasonable. But the *Essays* had at no time two better readers than in the second half of the

seventeenth century. One of these was Charles Cotton, whose translation has justly been esteemed a masterpiece. The other was George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, to whom Cotton dedicated his translation. The admirable author of *The Character of a Trimmer* was by the very constitution of his mind a spiritual kinsman of Montaigne, whose *Essays* he describes as "the book in the world I am best entertained with". Halifax writes to Cotton with the highest satisfaction in his work as a translator—to Cotton alone he yields in his devotion to Montaigne "as to a more prosperous lover". But Cotton himself frankly acknowledges that he had found the *Essays* "the hardest book to make a justifiable version of that I yet ever saw in that, or any other language I understand"; and it is true that spirited and vigorous as his translation is, it has, in not a few instances, missed the meaning of the original. Unhappily the correctors of Cotton do not always mend the matter, and sometimes they make the departures from the sense of Montaigne still wider. A translation substantially that of Cotton, but freed from Cotton's errors, and indicating, as far as could conveniently be done, the chronology of passages—those of 1580, those of 1588, and those of 1595—is still a thing to be desired. No single French edition adequately presents the successive states of the text; but an

advance in the direction of such an edition has been made by reprints of the three original texts, and by the collation made by MM. Courbet and Royer of the latest of these with the manuscript annotations in the Bordeaux copy of the last edition personally superintended by the author.

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